LAGRANGE
COUNTY
COURTHOUSE
1833-2007
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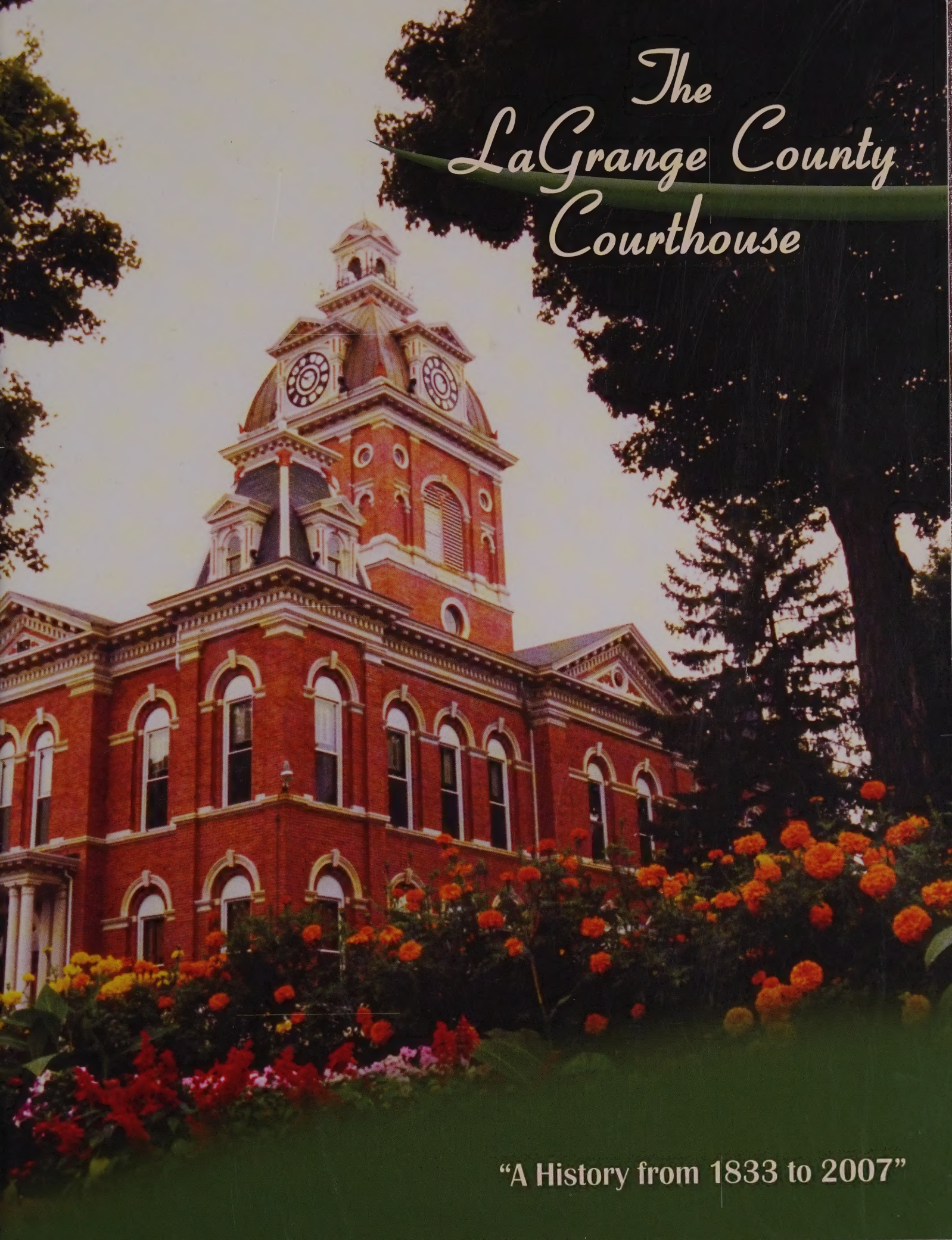

The LaGrange County Courthouse

"A History from 1833 to 2007"

Aerial View of the Courthouse

1986 - Photo by Jim Keeslar

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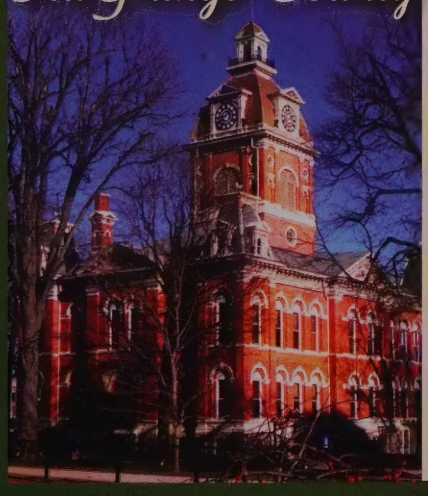
LaGrange County Courthouse



Serving as the focal point of LaGrange County for the past 174 years our present LaGrange County Court House is the third building to have been the seat of justice for LaGrange County.

The first court house was built in 1833 in Lima (Howe), then the County Seat. It was used for 10 years until county offices were moved to the centrally located town of LaGrange where a new court house was completed for occupancy in 1844. That second building was a two-story frame structure, with cupola, and was located on the front part of the present courtyard. It served the county for thirty-some years, until the Commissioners decided a new building was needed. Early in 1878 the building was moved to a farm east of Brighton where it was used as a barn for over 100 years, being demolished only a few years ago.

The First 100 Years

During the evening of October 29, 1869 an Indian called "Lost Jackson Boy" entered the wooden LaGrange County Courthouse, located at the corner of Michigan and Detroit streets in LaGrange, and began ringing the courthouse bell. John D. Devor, editor of the weekly LaGrange Standard, was not amused. The bell ringing, he wrote, "somewhat to the annoyance of our people" had been done because the Indian "lacked an audience to listen to his tales of frontier life" Such was the opinion of Mr. Devor.

It had been 30 years since the United States army had removed the Potawatomi Indians from LaGrange County in the late 1830's. Whether this lone Indian had been one of those taken west in 1839, many to Kansas, and who then wandered back to his old homeland in what had become LaGrange County, is not known, but Lost Jackson Boy was not listed in the town or county census taken less than one year later in 1870. And maybe the Indian himself was "annoyed" because "our people"– the whites who lived in LaGrange in 1869, had taken his home from him and his family.

The first Euro-American squatter settlers arrived in what was to become LaGrange County in 1828. Benjamin Blair located about a mile west of the Indian village, Mongoquinong. The Nathan Fowler and Jason Thurston families built and occupied a small one-room log cabin on the north side of Crooked Creek, later know as Fawn River, directly north of Mongoquinong (later named Lima, then Howe). Mongoquinong, it has claimed, at one time contained about 2,000 Indian inhabitants. By 1828 only about 30 "Indian huts" were left in the immediate area, scattered along Pigeon River west of the once larger village.

Prior to 1832, when LaGrange County became a separate entity, it was the eastern portion of Elkhart County and called LaGrange Territory or Mongoquinong township. According to the 1830 Elkhart county census there were only 214 whites in what was labeled LaGrange Territory, which included what was to become Steuben County and much of Noble and DeKalb Counties. In Elkhart County proper there were 709 persons with the county seat located at Goshen.

Besides the Indian settlement at Mongoquinong, there were Indian settlements on Pigeon river in the vicinity of what was to become the white village of Union Mills (later Mongo) and another settlement of the west side of the lake, later named Oliver. But Indians were not listed in the United States census in 1830 as the "head of the households" as were the whites, nor were their children listed by age categories. Much Native American history was lost due to the short-sighted policy of the federal government. Evidently, there were more Indians in "LaGrange Territory" in 1830 than whites, but they were invisible to the census takers.

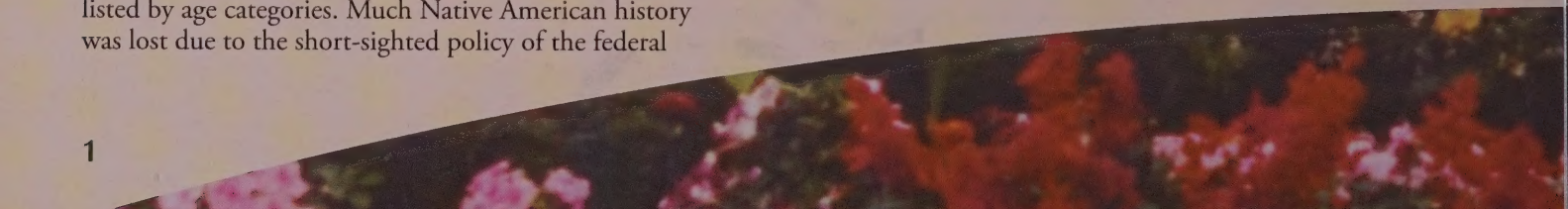
Although there were only 214 persons in LaGrange Territory or Mongoquinong Township enumerated in 1830, the influx of agricultural settlers and the opening of land sales at the Fort Wayne office led to residents petitioning the Indiana State Legislature for the creation of a separate county from Elkhart County. There were no wagon roads to connect with Goshen, the county seat, only an Indian trail and a journey of 40 or more miles for some settlers in LaGrange Territory if they had business to conduct at Goshen.

In 1831 the first land entries were made in what was to become LaGrange county. Seventeen men filed for the purchased land at the Fort Wayne land office, most for 80 acres and four; Daniel Fox, John Gardner, William Gardner and Benjamin Blair– for 160 acres. All 17 entries were located in what became present-day, Lima township. The men paid $1.25 per acre for their land and apparently had to buy a minimum of 80 acres.

The Creation of LaGrange County

On February 2, 1832 Indiana's Governor Noah Noble signed the legislation act which created LaGrange County, whose territory included the present-day Steuben County and three-fourths of what were to become Noble and DeKalb counties. LaGrange County shared its southern border with Allen County, Fort Wayne being the county seat. The law was to be effective on April 1, 1832. (On March 13, nineteen days before LaGrange County became official, the first white child , Henry M. Kromer, was born in a double log cabin in the southwest corner of the settlement at Mongoquinong. From 1889 through 1892 Henry Kromer was secretary of the " Old Settlers of LaGrange County" organization.

The law creating LaGrange County also provided five men, all from outside the county, to select a "seat of justice" (the county seat) by May of 1833. They were instructed to meet at the home of Moses Rice. The act also provided that an election be held to choose county officials and specified that the home of Moses Rice be the site for the meeting of the three commissioners and the first meeting of the Circuit Court. The three commissioners held their first session on May 14, 1832 and the Circuit Court first met on October 22, 1832.



At the election voters chose Jacob Vandevanter, Edmund Littlefield and Arthus Barrows to be the first commissioners, the legislative body for the county. Luther Newton and Ephraim Seely were elected as the associate judges, to sit with the Circuit Court judge when court was in session. The act creating LaGrange County also provided that the county agent appointed to oversee the sale of lots at the county seat should retain 10% of the proceeds for public library purposes.

When the commissioners held their first meeting at the house of Moses Rice of May 14th there were only eight families in the village of Mongoquinong. As commissioners their first official act was to appoint Dr. Joshua T. Hobbs temporary clerk. Dr. Hobbs was to prove an important office holder and land speculator in the early history of the county.

The commissioners then ordered that the county be divided into two townships: Lima Township, all territory west of the middle line of Range 10 and Greenfield Township, all land east of the middle line of Range 10. (Present day 300 East) Assessors were appointed: Benjamin Blair for Lima Township and Ephraim Seely for Greenfield. Elections were ordered to be held in June 1832 to elect two justices of the peace in each township.

Ten days later, on May 24th, at a special meeting the commissioners appointed Thomas Gale county treasurer, William Thrall county agent and two men from each township to be overseers of the poor, two men from each township to be fence viewers and two men from each township to be constables. The commissioners also ordered that a county school commissioner be elected at the next general election, which was in the fall of 1832. Commissioners' meetings and Circuit Court sessions were to be held in private homes until a courthouse could be built.

At the early court sessions there was a lot of swearing, but not on the Bible. At a court session held at the house of William A. McNeal, Jr. on February 23, 1832, when "Mongoquinong Township" technically was still a part of Elkhart County, Henry Switzer was fined $2.00 (equal to two days wages for a laborer) for "profane swearing." At the next session of court held at the home of Commissioner Arthus Barrows on May 22, 1832 three men were fined for "profane swearing:" (1) David Fowler , $3.00 (2) Alford Phillips, $7.00 and (3) Joel Leverich, $10.00. Leverich must have burnt the judge's ears. Perhaps Leverich was angry at having received another fine on the same day for $10.00 for an "assault and battery perpetuated on the body of John Hood."

Apparently, Leverich didn't learn his lesson. On September 26, 1832, four months after his $20.00 of fines, he was fined an additional $3.00 for an "assault and battery on the body of Hiram Hardin." But, no hard feelings– In May 1835 the commissioners appointed Leverich assessor for Lima Township, which with the previous formation of Eden and Bloomfield townships diminished the large Lima Territory but still left Lima Township composed of the future townships of Van Buren, Newberry, Clearspring, Clay and a portion of Johnson. Perhaps the commissioners felt Leverich wouldn't take any backtalk from the owners of property he was assessing. Four months after becoming assessor, Leverich received $6.00 for his work. But the commissioners got it back. At the same September 1835 session they received $8.00 from Leverich for a grocery license in the "Village of Mongoquinong." The following May, Leverich paid $5.00 to renew his liquor license for one year.

First County Tax Rates

The first tax rates for the newly formed LaGrange County were set at the special May 24, 1832 meeting of the commissioners. Horses used for stud purposes, $2.00; carriages, 50¢; horses 50¢; work oxen, 25¢; brass clocks, 50¢; watches, 25¢; tavern and grocery licenses, $7.50; foreign merchandise license, $12.50; wooden clock vending license, $5.00 and poll tax, 50¢. A poll (head tax) on each adult male was required for voting. This tax persisted in Indiana until the 1950's when it was $3.00.

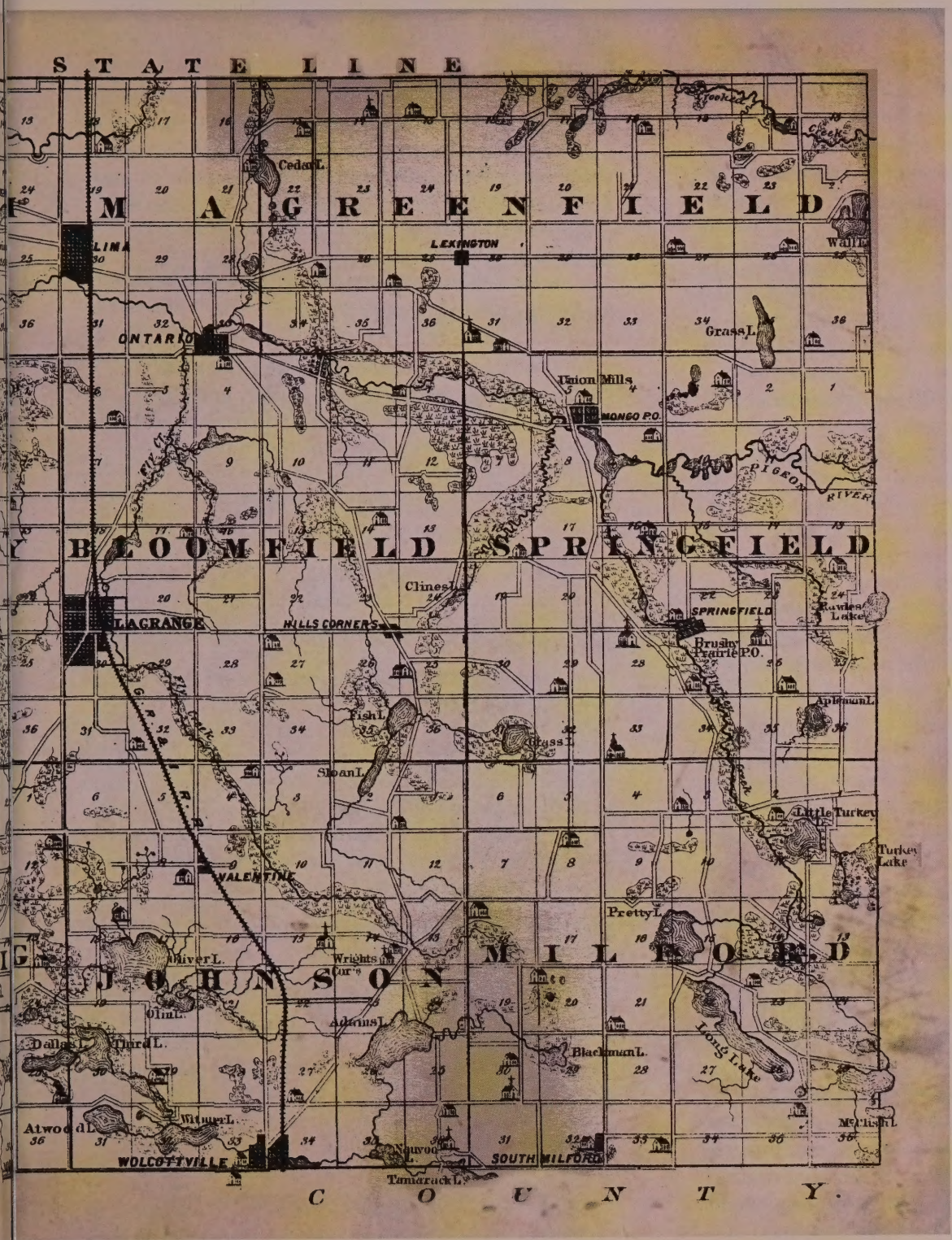
County Seat at Mongoquinong, Wolf Bounties

By January 1833, Mongoquinong had been chosen as the new county seat although as yet there was no courthouse. The commissioners and Circuit Court continued to meet in private homes or cabins. At their September 1832 meeting the commissioners continued to set up the structure of the county government, at which time they appointed Thomas Gale as agent of the Seminary (school) Fund. At the same meeting they set a bounty on wolves killed: $1.00 for an adult wolf and 50¢ for a young wolf under six months of age.

Map of LaGrange County

August 1874

Compiled and Drawn by
S.W. Durant, E.C. 1874


STATE LINE
GREENFIELD
LIMA
LEXINGTON
ONTARIO
Union Mills
MONGO P.O.
Grass L.
PIGEON RIVER
BLOOMFIELD
SPRINGFIELD
Clines L.
LAGRANGE
HILLS CORNERS
SPRINGFIELD
Rawles Lake
Brushy Prairie P.O.
Fish L.
Grass L.
Sloan L.
Little Turkey
Turkey Lake
VALENTINE
Pretty L.
MILFORD
JOHNSON
Wrights Cor's
Adams L.
Blackman L.
Long Lake
Third L.
Atwood L.
Wilmer L.
WOLCOTTVILLE
Nguwo L.
SOUTH MILFORD
Tamarack L.
COUNTY.

Roads

But a major portion of the commissioners' attention was given to the construction of wagon roads. Before 1833 only Indian trails existed, a number entering Mongoquinong, one of which wound its way to Goshen and another which headed south and east eventually connecting with Fort Wayne. Citizens would petition the commissioners for a road. After it was received the commissioners appointed "viewers" to examine, survey and recommend the best route, to be accepted, modified or rejected by the commissioners. One of the first requests was an east-west road (from present day Scott to Mongoquinong to present day Brighton to "Little Prairie"). The second project, with state legislative backing, was to create a wagon road basically following the Indian trail between Fort Wayne and Mongoquinong. It would prove an important link for LaGrange County farmers to haul their grain and other farm products to market at Fort Wayne. When corn could not reach distant markets it would be ground into corn meal for home use or made in whiskey at distilleries at Union Mills or Lima.

Plank Road

The wagon road to Fort Wayne was greatly improved during the late 1840's by the construction of the Plank road, known as the Lima Plank Road, completed from Fort Wayne to Ontario and used for about 10 years. A privately owned road, stock was sold to raise money to build it and tollgates were established about every six miles. Built over thick slabs of black walnut "sleepers", laid parallel on the roadbed, the planks laid crosswise to the sleepers and were fourteen-feet long and three inches thick, all sawed from black walnut trees. The richest grove of these trees, amounting to over 200 acres, was located on the west side of Bixler Lake in Noble County. Although the existing commissioners' records do not reveal when Mongoquinong was chosen to be the county seat or when the first courthouse was authorized to be built, the commissioner's meeting minutes of January 7, 1833 reveal the following: "Ordered that Daniel Harding, George Egnew and Luther Newton to be appointed viewers to view a proposed Rout (sic) for a public road commencing at the County Seat of LaGrange County thence North on the Range line dividing Ranges Nine & Ten– So far as to intersect the North line of the State –" (present-day road nine from Howe to the Indiana-Michigan state line). So the settlement of Mongoquinong had been designated the county seat by January 1833.

Lima Village Platted

On August 29, 1832 Moses Rice, his brother Ica Rice and Jonathan Gardner purchased the land that became the village of Lima. In October 1834 surveyor John Kromer (the father of "firstborn" Henry Kromer) surveyed and platted a portion of the purchase into 286 lots, 87' x 104'. By the time the Rice brothers had bought out Gardner's share, eighty-four of the lots were donated to the county for the county seat being located there. In addition the proprietors donated land for a public square plus two acres for a cemetery in the southern portion of the village.

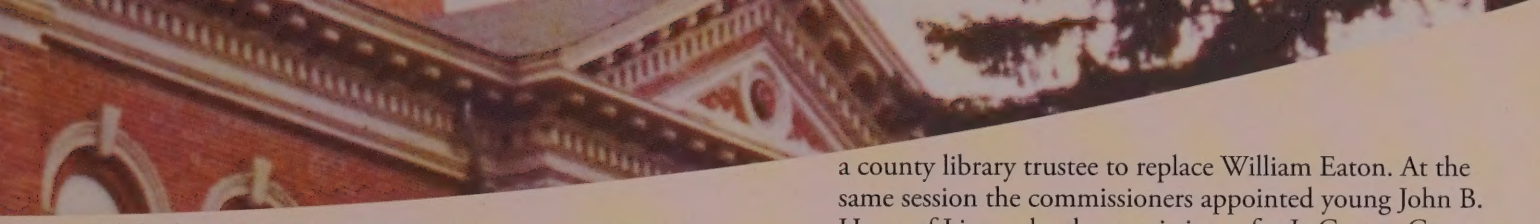
Mongoquinong Post Office

Early on, a post office called Mongoquinong was established at the settlement and "Judge" Ephraim Seely became postmaster. He soon moved to Greenfield township and the post office went with him to the settlement at Union Mills (later called Mongo). At Union Mills the name Mongoquinong remained with the post office until 1870.

Meanwhile, at the original village of Mongoquinong, where the county seat was located, the state legislature in 1833 or 1834 changed its name from Mongoquinong to Lima. This could have been done because: 1, The Mongoquinong post office had wandered off to Greenfield Township and then to Springfield Township and the two names would be confusing; or 2, A post office was needed at the village of Mongoquinong and the name couldn't be used twice for a post office. Even the county clerk's records show the confusion of the names. As late as 1837 at the January session of the commissioners one reference was made to the "Village of Lima" and another reference was made to "lots in the Town of Mongoquinong".

Indians and Wolves

When the Euro-American land squatters/settlers began to move into the LaGrange territory in the late 1820's and early 1830's there were two obstacles which needed to be removed– the Indians and the wolves, as the great majority of the newcomers were farmers looking for cheap land. While it was up to the federal government to get rid of the Indians from LaGrange County, it was up to the county government to get rid of the wolves, which like to kill and eat the settlers' livestock– particularly sheep.



While the Native Americans and the wolves had lived in harmony– there were enough deer for both, the Euro-Americans wanted to use the habitat for domestic agriculture purposes only, so the Indians and wolves had to go. Within 10 years the mission was nearly accomplished. By 1840 the Indians had all been removed from the county but it took a little longer to eliminate most wolves. (The last bear in LaGrange County was shot and killed by Samuel P. Williams, who owned a major trading post in Lima.)

The commissioners authorized a one-dollar bounty for adult wolves in 1833 and fifty cents for a wolf under six months old. In 1837 the bounty was doubled to two dollars and by 1843 had been increased to five dollars. By 1845 bounties on 47 wolves had been paid by the commissioners.

The First Courthouse and John M. Brown

At a date not recorded, probably 1833, the commissioners authorized a two-story frame courthouse to be built at Mongoquinong. They would have needed a piece of ground first. Although the History of LaGrange and Noble Counties, published in 1882, stated that the village of Mongoquinong was "laid out" by surveyor John Kromer in October 1834, the LaGrange County Atlas published in 1893 stated that the town of "Lima" was platted in 1832.

Apparently construction started on the courthouse during the summer of 1834, as the first recorded payments made by the commissioners were in September of 1834. At the September term the commissioners allowed Thomas Gale one dollar "for furnishing wagon (sic) to haul courthouse timbers", and allowed Arthur Barrows $17.40 "for timbers for underpinning courthouse."

At their March 1835 session the commissioners paid John M. Brown $524.50 for "the balance in full due him on his courthouse contract." At their September 1835 session the commissioners paid Brown an additional $173.38 on his "courthouse contract" although it supposedly had been paid in full the previous March.

Adult males in frontier settlements often were required to wear many "hats", to serve several functions as there was a limited population to fulfill the many roles necessary to develop new communities. By 1835 John M. Brown not only had built the new courthouse but he had become sheriff, a post he held until 1837. While sheriff, in November 1835 the commissioners appointed him as a county library trustee to replace William Eaton. At the same session the commissioners appointed young John B. Howe of Lima school commissioner for LaGrange County. Howe was 22 years old. In 1833 he had conducted the first one-room school in the county on the banks of Pigeon River in Mongoquinong.

Sheriff Brown continued his role as courthouse contractor and in January 1836 the commissioners paid him $56.95 for "steepling" the courthouse from money collected by County Agent Daniel Harding (who also wore many "hats") from the sale of county lots. Brown received an additional $32.00 for "extra services" as sheriff, apparently in addition to his regular pay. And, at the March 1836 session of the commissioners, they appointed Brown to be County Assessor for 1836 (who could argue if the sheriff was assessing your property?). Brown was courthouse contractor, county sheriff, county library trustee and county assessor– all within a twelve month period.

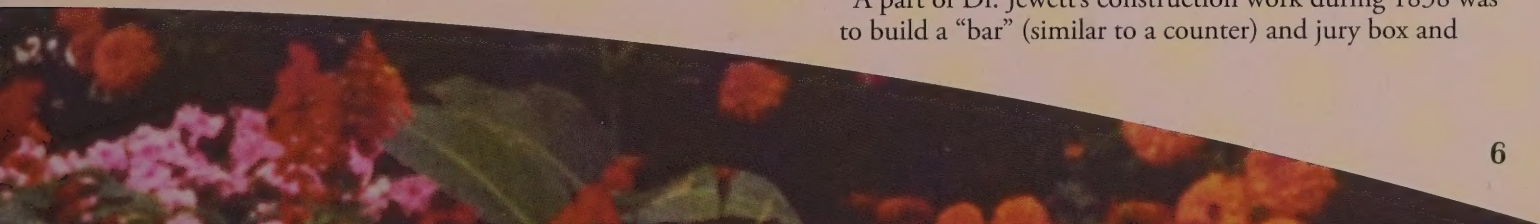
Dr. Francis F. Jewett

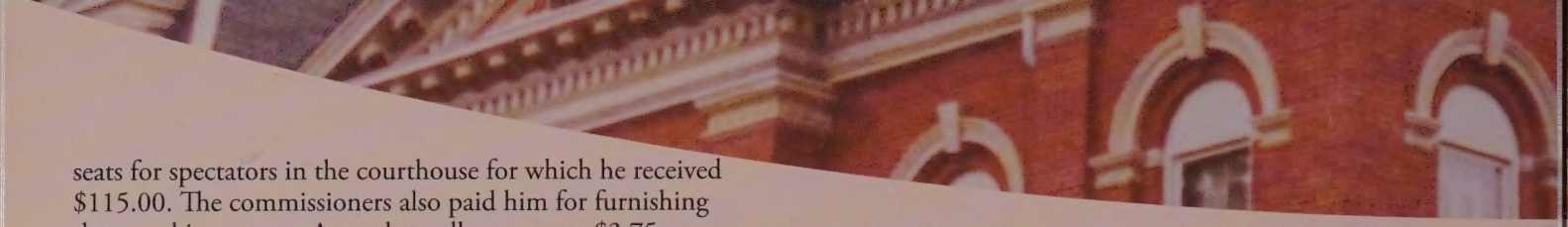
Another man who wore many hats and performed various duties for the commissioners and the county was Dr. Francis F. Jewett. When Jewett arrived at Mongoquinong in 1834 as a thirty-year old, he already wore two hats, that of physician and that of attorney. He soon became a contractor as well, doing repairs and additional work on the courthouse, building an addition to the county jail, constructing the new county pound, securing the contract in 1842 to build a new courthouse in the recently platted village of LaGrange and building the new county jail in LaGrange. In 1840 the commissioners appointed him county assessor and the commissioners paid him to give medical treatment to paupers, including one Henry O'Brian.

County Jail

In September 1837 the commissioners voted to build an addition to the one-room jail which previously had been built. A square one-room addition, equal in size to the existing jail, was to be added and the "old" jail was to have a second story built on top of it and a new roof added. The commissioners awarded the contract to Jewett and by the end of the fiscal year on November 1, 1838 he had received $578.00 for his work. During the following fiscal year an additional $30.94 was paid for a stove and digging a well for the jail. The jail was built across the street from the southwest corner of the public square on which the courthouse had been built. The jail also contained resident quarters for the sheriff.

A part of Dr. Jewett's construction work during 1838 was to build a "bar" (similar to a counter) and jury box and





seats for spectators in the courthouse for which he received $115.00. The commissioners also paid him for furnishing the grand jury room. A much smaller amount, $3.75, was paid Jewett in March of 1841, but which required much more work, for providing three cords of stove wood for heating the courthouse. After completing his work as county assessor for 1840 he was paid $225.00 for "assessing revenue."

County Pound

After the courthouse and jail, a pound for stray animals became the third public building project for the commissioners. At their May 1838 session, they instructed the county agent to let a job building "a Pound in the county seat 60' x 60' with oak posts eight inches in diameter, nine feet long with three feet of posts to be in the ground, the posts to be set six feet apart." The posts were to be enclosed "with good inch boards," twelve feet long. Peter L. Mason, who was the sheriff, was appointed the Pound Keeper.

Francis Jewett received the contract to build the pound and received $50.00 for his work. By December 1841 Fredrick Hamilton, then the sheriff, received $8.00 for keeping the pound for two years, having received the appointment in 1839.

At one point a stray horse was taken to the pound and when not claimed sold by the sheriff for $15.15. Apparently the stray horse belonged to Leonard Andrew, as later the commissioners allowed a payment of $14.92 to him for the horse sold by the sheriff. The 23¢ difference may have been deducted for keep.

Paupers and A Poor House

During the fiscal year May 1, 1839 the county had received $1511.95 in revenue, including taxes and license fees, and had spent $1686.08 for a deficit of $174.13. During the fiscal year the commissioners were paid $69.00 for their services. During the same fiscal year $172.16 was paid to individuals for the care of paupers. Private individuals were paid for boarding them and doctors were paid for any medical expenses incurred for their care. The payment of $172.16 represented just over 10% of the county's annual expenditure for 1838-1839 and six month later, in November 1839 the commissioners called for bids for a tract of land, 20 to 40 acres, on which to build a county "Poor House."

In January 1840 they approved the purchase of 30 acres of land from Amasa Durand two miles north and east of what was to become the town of LaGrange or about four miles south and east of Lima. S.R. Mills, contracted to build the Poor House, received $475.00 for his work in September 1840 and by the end of the fiscal year had been paid a total of $514.00.

In March 1841 a resident named Kiah Gold contracted with the commissioners to manage the Poor House. He received $1.35 per week for each pauper boarded. He also was required to build a 24' x 34' barn with lumber provided by the county. On March 8, 1843 Shedrick "Karney" (Carney) received a two-year contract from the commissioners to manage the Poor House and farm. In return he would receive free rent of the house and apparently could realize some more income by raising and selling agriculture products. Carney's first payment was $21.00 for boarding James Robertson & "washing after his death." Little did Carney know that four generations of his descendants would be professional undertakers in LaGrange County.

First Commissioners Session at Lima Courthouse

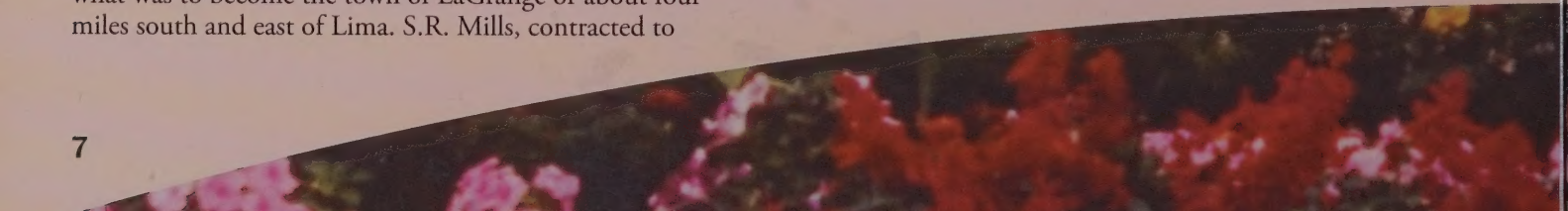
At a session of the board of commissioners of LaGrange County, held at the courthouse in said county on Monday and the fifth day of May in the year 1835– Present– William S. Prentiss, president, Jesse Champlin & David Smith, comrs. Also present Joshua T. Hobbs, clerk of said board & Dan'l Harding, Sheriff: is the first mention in the commissioner's records of meeting in the new courthouse. At the session they paid $5.25 to O.C. Wood for rent of a "Jury Room" when the court had met in March 1835, as the courthouse apparently had not been ready for occupancy.

At this first meeting in the new courthouse, the commissioners ordered that Bloomfield township be created from Lima and Greenfield townships and constituted as a separate entity. And they ordered that an election be held at the home of Moses J. Hill in Bloomfield to elect a Justice of the Peace for the township.

Apparently it was during the summer or fall of 1835 that Sheriff John M. Brown added a steeple to the courthouse as he was paid $56.95 by County Agent Daniel Harding from the proceeds of lots he had sold for the county.

LaGrange County Library

The state legislative act which created LaGrange county in 1832 included a provision that the county agent appointed to superintend the sale of lots at the county seat should



retain 10% of the proceeds for the use of a public library. Little is known about the use of this money in LaGrange County.

As previously noted, in September 1835 the commissioners appointed Sheriff John M. Brown as a county library trustee in place of William Eaton, which indicated that others besides Eaton had been appointed library trustees at an earlier date. At that same session the commissioners had allowed $24.88 for the county library. Had $248.80 worth of lots been sold?

At a September 1837 meeting of the commissioners they appointed seven men to be trustees of the library: Luther Minton, Samuel Cory, Jonathon Woodruff, Jr., John Kromer, Samuel P. Williamson, Richard H. Fury and Daniel Harding. (Four months after being appointed library trustee, Harding was fined $12.50– a very large amount of money then– for "betting.")

At the May 1838 commissioners meeting it was noted that $16.00 in cash had been received for the county library and Daniel Harding had been appointed the county agent, reported that $30.72 was in hand for the library.

At their January 1841 meeting the commissioners appointed seven new men library trustees: Thomas J. Spaulding, Christopher Cory (Presbyterian Church pastor in Lima), Mills Averill (the county school supervisor), William H. Gardner, Francis F. Jewett, Irwin M. Cuter and Aaron Thompson.

Between 1835 and 1845 the only use of library funds noted in the commissioners reports was $2.00 approved at the December 1845 meeting for a subscription to the "History of Indiana." Two dollars from the county seminary (school) fund was allowed for the same purpose.

In December 1845 when County Agent Fredrick Hamilton reported the receipt of $141.35 for the sale of LaGrange lots, after the courthouse had been moved to LaGrange, it was noted that "also money arising from the Library" had been received. Since no mention of a separate library building was ever made in the commissioner's minutes, books– for whatever purpose– may have been kept in one of the courthouse offices.

Dr. Moses J. Hill

During the year 1832 and 1845 the commissioners rarely disallowed a monetary claim. One case, however, occurred in January 1835 when Dr. Moses J. Hill presented his claim after treating Shyler Pain and family, who were paupers. Although they paid other physicians for treating paupers, including Dr. Francis Jewett and Dr. Joshua Hobbs in 1836, the commissioners refused to pay Dr. Hill. In 1843 the commissioners even paid $25.00 in advance to Dr. Isaac Perry for any treatment of paupers at the Poor House for the following year.

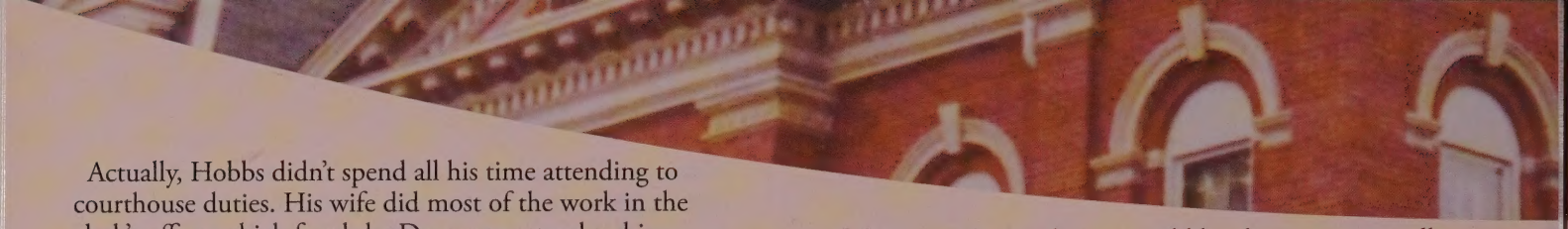
Probably arriving in 1829 Dr. Hill had been the first physician to settle in LaGrange County. Elkhart County's "LaGrange Territory" he was listed as one of only 37 households. Although Dr. Hill considered himself a "regular" physician, he used only natural flora, the roots and herbs found in abundance in the woods. He traveled the country by horseback from St. Joseph in Michigan to Fort Wayne in Indiana and had a reputation of staying with the sick, wherever found, until they recovered or passed away.

Dr. Hill never used quinine, also called Jesuits' bark or Peruvian bark but depended instead on the bark dogwood and ironwood to break the "intermittent," also known as the ague, a fever of malarial character often suffered by residents of LaGrange county in the 1840's. Ague victims experienced chills, fever and sweating which occurred at regular intervals. Dr. Hill also used calico-root, which grew at the edge of marshes, for cathartic purposes.

For the treatment of pneumonia he used wild turnip and blood-root, which were abundant in the woods. He claimed he never bled his pneumonia cases, and said that he rarely lost a case. The "regular" physicians at the time used bleeding and "reducing remedies" and apparently lost a much larger number of pneumonia cases.

Dr. Josiah T. Hobbs

About 1830 Dr. Josiah T. Hobbs was the second physician to arrive in LaGrange Territory. A native of Maryland and a graduate of Bowdin College in Maine, Dr. Hobbs soon took over the entire medical practice of the territory and soon ingratiated himself into the political life of LaGrange County. During the first meeting of the commissioners in May 1832 they appointed him temporary clerk of the Circuit Court, a position he soon held by election from 1832 to 1838. In 1838, when County Recorder David St. Clair left the county, the commissioners appointed Dr. Hobbs acting recorder. In 1837 he was elected to that position and held it until 1843 when, as a Whig, he was elected LaGrange County's representative to the state legislature. In 1844 the voters elected Hobbs as one of two associate judges to the LaGrange county Circuit Court.



Actually, Hobbs didn't spend all his time attending to courthouse duties. His wife did most of the work in the clerk's office, which freed the Doctor to attend to his medical practice and other growing interests, mainly land speculation. Before the second courthouse was built at the undeveloped LaGrange location in 1842 and 1843, Hobbs had secured possession of about one-half of the LaGrange town site and was instrumental in securing it as the new county seat. With the new courthouse with county officers and court sessions located there, town lots became a valuable investment and Hobbs had built a fortune by the time he left LaGrange County in 1850, moving to Ohio, where he died in 1879.

During the time Dr. Hobbs was county clerk of the Circuit Court beginning in 1832, he was paid in addition to his regular salary, for "extra-services:" 1832 - $65.00, 1833 - $20.00, 1834 - $110.00 and 1835 - $78.32 for a total of $273.32, apparently for work done primarily by his wife. The extra pay alone could have purchased approximately 220 acres of land in LaGrange County from the Fort Wayne land office, as entry on federal land was $1.25 per acre.

Another of Dr. Hobbs various duties was trustee of LaGrange Collegiate Institute. At the founding of the Institute on February 6, 1837 Hobbs was selected on the first board of trustees, seven in number. The Institute, to be modeled after Oberlin College in Ohio, was to be located in the village of Ontario, which was platted on March 7, 1837.

Relocation of County Seat to LaGrange

In 1840, after lobbying by residents from the central and southern potions of LaGrange County, the state legislature passed a law, which allowed for the relocation of the county seat from Lima to a more central location. When the county seat had been located at Mongoquinong in 1833 most newcomers in the sparsely populated county settled in its northern section where prairie land existed and which was much easier to develop into crop land and for pasture than heavily wooded areas.

These prairie lands became know as Mongoquinong Prairie, Little Prairie, Pretty Prairie, English Prairie and Brushy Prairie. By 1838, when the last township had been organized– Clay township, on September 4, 1838– hundreds had settled in the center tier and southern tier of the townships. In the 1840 census the northern three townships– VanBuren, Lima and Greenfield– contained 1608 persons. The middle tier of townships– Newbury, Clay, Bloomfield and Springfield– had 980 persons and the southern tier– comprised of Eden, Clearspring, Johnson and Milford– had a population of 1076. About two-thirds of the county's population would be closer to a centrally located county seat. By 1840 Lima village was home to 179 residents in only 30 households.

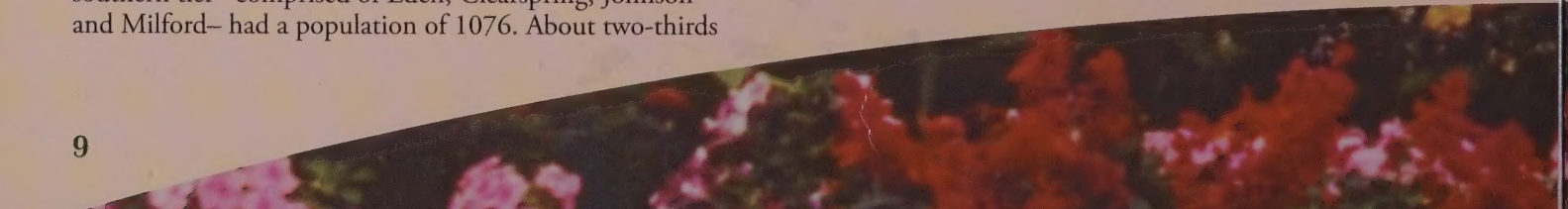
In 1835, the original LaGrange town site, located at the geographic center of the county was purchased by George F. Whittaker and Theodore Craft at the Fort Wayne land office by entry, apparently a purchase of 80 acres. On June 18, 1836 a portion of this was platted into a town site by Whittaker, Reuben J. Dawson, William F. Beavers and James McConnell. It was platted into 36 blocks with eight lots on each block for a total of 288 lots. The site was covered with thick woods and heavy undergrowth of prickly ash and blackberry bushes.

The same year the town site was platted, one of the owners, James McConnell was elected LaGrange County commissioner. McConnell was a resident of Eden Township and a son of William McConnell, one of the very first settlers in Eden Township in the fall of 1832. Prior to 1840, when the state authorized the move of the county seat, Dr. Hobbs, who then was a county recorder had purchased one-half of the platted LaGrange townsite.

On February 13, 1840 the state legislature appointed a commission to determine where the new county seat would be sited. The "locating" commissioners were men who resided outside of LaGrange County. One of them Albert Cole, came to LaGrange County, but found there was not a quorum of locating commissioners so there was "no business done," according to the minutes of the LaGrange county commissioners in their May 1841 session. But they paid Cole $15.00 for his attendance even though no quorum had been present.

At the same May 1841 session the commissioners paid $35.93 to Joshua Hobbs (who was county recorder), $21.08 to Reuben J. Dawson and $17.18 to William McConnell for "money advance" by the three men, "to the locating commissioners." All three men, Hobbs, Dawson and McConnell at the time had a direct financial interest in the platted, unsettled, town site of LaGrange. Why the commissioners or the state hadn't "advanced" money to the locating commissioners is not known. But by selecting the LaGrange town site as the future county seat, the locating commissioners had provided a small pot of gold for Hobbs, Dawson and McConnell.

On February 20, 1841 the proprietors of the paper town site of LaGrange showed their thanks for being chosen as the county seat by donating 100 lots, or about 35% of the



town site, to the commissioners of LaGrange County. In addition the owners of the town site donated a number of "out lots", land adjacent to but outside the platted town site. At their September 1841 session the commissioners ordered the hiring of a surveyor, most likely John Kromer, to survey the "out" lots donated to them into parcels of four acres each. The "in" and "out" lots were to be offered for sale through County Agent Daniel Harding, beginning on October 23, 1841.

At the December 1841 session of the commissioners, they offered a five-dollar prize for the best courthouse plan: to be submitted by the first Monday in March 1842. And at their March 1842 meeting the commissioners authorized the survey for a wagon road to be built from the "paper" town of LaGrange to Northport, which was located just north of the present town of Rome City. As an example of the wages paid at the time, John Carney (the father of Shedrick Carney) received $1.50 from the commissioners for two days work as chainman on the survey crew, which located the "LaGrange to Northport" wagon trail.

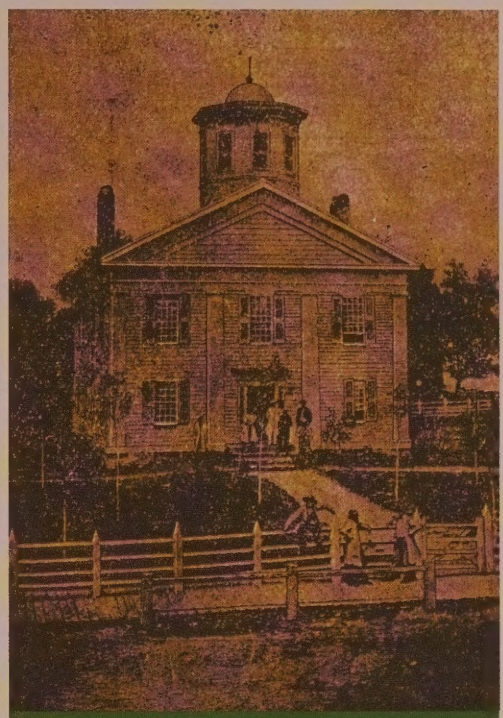
At their March 1842 meeting the commissioners arranged for a special meeting two weeks later to make further plans for "building a courthouse." Washington Bailey won the competition for his courthouse plan and received $10.00 rather than $5.00. Apparently the commissioners were more pleased with Bailey's design.

In June, Daniel Harding, the county agent, was instructed by the commissioners to let a contract for clearing the "public square", to grub all standing trees and clear out all the undergrowth. Curtis Harding received the contract and was paid $15.00, including the clearing the streets "north, east and west of the square." Shedrick Carney, who apparently worked for Curtis Harding, has been given credit for felling the first tree on the future public square.

The commissioners, also at the June 1842 meeting, appointed County Recorder Joshua Hobbs and County Agent Daniel Harding to select a spot on the new public square to build the courthouse. Their job was to be completed by the following September 1. At the same meeting Benjamin Jones, the newly elected president of the commissioners, signed a contract with Dr. Francis F. Jewett to build a two-story frame courthouse to be completed by December 1, 1843, eighteen months away. The other commissioners were Robert Hume and Abraham Rowe.

1844 Courthouse Specifications

The Washington Bailey plans called for a 40' x 50' courthouse covered with pine shingles and the walls studs to have 12' centers. The window studs were to be 4" x 6" and the door studs to be 3" x 6". A stone foundation, two feet wide by three feet high with one foot of the three below ground level and the foundation above ground to be laid in lime mortar.



The First Courthouse at LaGrange 1844 to 1879 *- The above image is the first courthouse at LaGrange when in use. This building was moved to a farm east of Brighton where it was made into a barn and may still be seen.*

The ground floor was to have six offices, three on the south side of the building and three on the north, with a hall to run from east to west and a door at each end. The office rooms, on each side, were to be 14' x 18', 14' x 14' and 12' 6" x 14' with a door on each room facing the hallway. At the west end of the hallway, double stairs were to lead to the second floor court room and two jury rooms, the later being 10' x 14' and located at the west end of the building.

In the court room the judge's bench was to be 10' in length with a projecting counter supported by four pillars of the Doric order on the first floor. There were to be two stacks of brick chimneys with a fireplace in each with stove pipe holes in the chimneys to accommodate stove pipes coming from the adjoining rooms. Triple plastering was to be done on the inside walls and the ground floor was to be covered with tile.

The cupola for the top of the roof was designated by the Bailey plan and each of the four sides was to be covered with "Venetian blinds" and the top covered with oak

material. There were to be eight windows on each side (north and south) of the courthouse (four on each floor) and four windows (two on each floor) on the east and west sides. The building was to be painted white on the outside, three coats and the inside painted a "lead color."

The contract was for $3400.00 at the time the contract was signed in June 1842, the commissioners paid $200.00 to Recorder Hobbs for land to the north of the "out" lots donated to the county by Hobbs and the other town proprietors. Hobbs was allowed to take the timber off the land prior to April 1, 1843.

The commissioners, at this June session, set a road tax of 1¼¢ per acre on privately owned land, which would include all agricultural land.

That summer of 1842, Jewett began work on the two-story courthouse. By October 12, after the site had been cleared, the stone foundation had been completed and the timber frame erected. "Good materials and well put together" concluded the commissioners at their special meeting at the Lima courthouse.

At the December 1842 meeting the commissioners paid $2.00 to John Y. Clark and $4.00 to John Thompson, the "building committee" for the new building and for the time they had expended on the project. (Clark also received an additional $5.00 for a wolf bounty at the session.) Curtis Harding received $22.85 for digging a "county well" in LaGrange Village, probably on the lot where the courthouse was being constructed.

At their June 1843 meeting the commissioners paid contractor Jewett an extra $135.00 for Venetian blinds for each window in the courthouse. (These probably were constructed of wood.) Dr. Jewett also received as payment lot 6 of block 17 (the present north one-half of the courthouse annex building) for building steps and a "platform" (deck or porch) at the east end of the courthouse, which apparently wasn't included in the contract.

At their December 5, 1843 meeting the commissioners "accepted" the new LaGrange courthouse as completed. Jewett received an extra $25.00 for covering the cupola with tin and $708.00 for his "Bill of Extra Work" a cost overrun of 21%. Total cost: $4268.00. (The LaGrange County History stated the cost at $8000.00.) The courthouse, LaGrange county's second, was used for 36½ years. The Lima courthouse had been used for 19 years.

LaGrange Village - 1843

The first two dwellings built at the site of the future county seat were constructed of log and built by Isaac P. Grannis and Thomas Clark. The Grannis place was used as a boarding house for the courthouse workers. Isaac Grannis being a sub-contractor and carpenter who worked for Francis Jewett. Another carpenter (and cabinet maker) who worked on the Courthouse was James Packer. Packer and his wife Esther along with Grannis and his wife were two of the four couples who founded the Methodist church at the village. Packer was named leader. The Packer's son, Alferd, born about the time the courthouse was being built became the most famous or infamous man in LaGrange county history when in 1883 he was convicted of killing five fellow gold prospectors in Colorado in 1873 and eating them– to prevent starvation he claimed. Packer always claimed he had shot only one of the men, in self defense.

Isaac Grannis had worked on the Lima courthouse in 1839 by building steps and placing underpinning around the building. Apparently he was the son or brother of Palmer Grannis, elected county commissioner in 1835 and later in 1840.

At the September 1843 commissioners meeting in Lima, three months before the LaGrange courthouse was completed, the commissioners granted William Wigton a vendor's license for LaGrange at a cost of $5.00. Wigton built the first frame building, a warehouse, on the northeast corner of Spring and Detroit streets in the village, across the street from the southeast corner of what would become the public square. It was at the Wingon place that Charles B. Holmes opened the first store in the fledgling village and in 1843 Holmes was named the first postmaster in LaGrange. He conducted the post office in his store and his receipts for the first three months of business amounted to $1.08. Several other small dwellings were built at the new county seat site in 1843.

At the December 1843 meeting of the commissioners at which they accepted the courthouse building from contractor Jewett, they appointed sub-contractor Isaac Grannis to be in charge of the new building. It was to be kept shut and no longer used as a shop. It was permitted to be used for public purposes, but only if Grannis were present and only if the "hall" were used (about 12' wide).

County Agent Daniel Harding was to sell all remaining lots the LaGrange proprietors of the town site had donated to the county in 1841 and any lots which previously had been sold but not paid for. The commissioners paid Francis Jewett and additional $1.00 for carving the county seal

for the clerk's office. They also ordered at the December 1843 meeting that fire insurance for the new courthouse be purchased at once from the Mutual Insurance Company of Indianapolis.

The commissioners assigned rooms at the new courthouse as follows: the southeast room (morning and afternoon sun) to the clerk; the southwest room to the auditor; the northeast room to the recorder; the northwest room to the Grand Jury. The Sheriff received a room with a fireplace and the last room on the first floor was assigned to the county treasurer.

At the last meeting of the commissioners in the Lima courthouse, beginning on March 6, 1844, the commissioners ordered the county offices moved to the new LaGrange courthouse by June 1, 1844. The recently elected Sheriff, James Rawles, was ordered to take charge of the new building.

Specifications for a new county jail in LaGrange had been prepared by Francis Jewett and bids on the log structure, with cellar, were opened on March 25, 1844. Surprise! Francis Jewett received the contract for the combination jail and jailer's residence for $1579.50. The March 25 meeting was a special meeting and the first one of the commissioners held at LaGrange. (During the early years of the town's history, county residents commonly referred to the village as, "LaGrange Center" or simply "The Center."

The commissioners paid Alexander Holmes $35.00 for his lot (#5, block #19) on which to build the new jail on High street. (The location is the north one-half of the present site of the former LaGrange county one-story jail, now sitting empty in 2007 and scheduled for demolition.)

Frederick Hamilton, the former sheriff (1839-1843) and the newly appointed county agent, was instructed to buy furniture for the new courthouse by June 1. About this time, on April 6, 1844, the county sold to John B. Howe of Lima and James H. Holmes, school section #16 (640 acres) in Eden Township for $1025.60 or $1.88 per acre. Very few county residents would have that much cash to make such a payment.

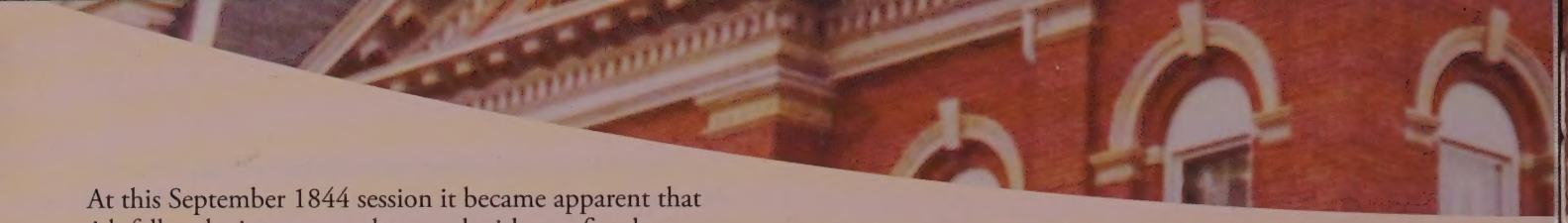
The commissioners met for their first regular session at the new courthouse on June 3, 1844. One of their first items of business was to pay "Shadrach" (Shedrick) Carney $28.50 for boarding a pauper, or paupers at the Poor House. The next day the commissioners ordered the Lima courthouse to be sold, along with the jail and jail lot and the pound and lot on which it was located. The sale was to take place on June 29. 1844.

After being sold, the old courthouse was used for various purposes. It was used as a school and a hotel. At one time Francis Jewett used it as a tavern. Eventually fire destroyed the building. The county jail, which had been built in Lima by 1836, was still standing in 1882 when the History of LaGrange and Noble Counties was published, and by 1917 was a barn/storage shed behind the home of John S. Wills.

On June 4, 1844, at the second days commissioners' session at the courthouse, they paid $6.00 to William Dickinson for eight tin signs, to be placed on the doors of the county officer and jury rooms. The next day the county agent was ordered to employ a man to "clear off" the public square of all remaining trees and brush and to have the "swamp" drained, which was to the south of the new building. The county agent also was ordered to have a new county Pound constructed on lot #2, Block#2, the southeast corner of Lake street and Walnut street, one of the lots donated to the county by the proprietors of the LaGrange town site, and to be completed by September 1.

On the same day, the commissioners, the second day of their conducting business at the new courthouse, realizing that if the trees on the courthouse property were to disappear, they would need a place for "personal business." They instructed the county agent to have erected "a good and suitable privy" near the courthouse. And to complete a very busy day of essential business, the commissioners concluded with contract with Francis Jewett to build the new jail and ordered the auditor to alter the assessments on the LaGrange town site lots. Lots around the public square (then only the east one-half or less of the present public square) were to be assessed at $35.00 each. Other Detroit Street lots (the main street bordering the east side of the public "square") were assessed at an average of $20.00 and the remaining lots back from the main streets at an average of $3.00 each.

In September, at the second regular session at the new courthouse the commissioners authorized the purchase of "scrapers" for road work. These were drawn by horses. Another interesting matter before the commissioners was the action by the state legislature, which allowed the commissioners to select two students from the county to attend Indiana University. Apparently each county had the same privilege. A young man, Samuel Thrailkill, had applied to the commissioners to be so selected and had his request honored. Thrailkill, perhaps, was the first LaGrange County resident to attend a college or university.



At this September 1844 session it became apparent that with fall and winter upon them and with two fireplaces and a number of stoves in the new courthouse, fuel would be required. They paid Job "Row" (Rowe) $19.16 for 44 cords for wood (a cord being 4' x 4' x 8') which would occupy a space of eight feet deep, four feet high and 176 feet long. Quite a woodpile, all sawed by hand and a bargain at 43¼¢

At their January 1845 session, with the wood fires keeping them warm, the commissioners authorized George Holmes, for $487.00, to build a new county seminary (school) "near LaGrange." They also paid George Hopkins $10.00 for land for the seminary. Where it was to be located if it was built, and who could attend are unanswered questions.

To provide further safety for the courthouse, in September 1845 the commissioners ordered a lightening rod installed and in December they instructed the sheriff to provide hitching posts and bars near the courthouse where horses could be hitched while their owners conducted business. At the December 1845 session the commissioners allowed a grand total of 68¢ to be paid to Miss H. Gray for "schooling two paupers." It was only the second time since the county had been founded in 1832 that a woman had been allowed money by the commissioners for services performed. The first case was that of Rebecca Gardner, who was allowed $30.00 by the commissioners in 1837, for keeping a pauper. In politics, involving contracts and patronage, it was a man's world.

Growth of Town and Country

With the location of the county seat at LaGrange Center and courthouse offices open for business by the summer of 1844, the little settlement began to grow. In six years, by the time of the 1850 census, it had become a village with 328 residents but it wasn't incorporated into a town until 1855.

The county had grown too. In 1840, with the county's population at 3664 and with the realization that the county seat needed to be more centrally located, by 1850 the population of the county had more than doubled to 8387. Much more land had been cleared for agricultural purposes but no railroads crossed the county, which limited its growth.

By 1860 the population of LaGrange village had doubled during the decade from 328 to 670 residents and the county had gained nearly 3000 in population or increased about 36%. Lima had 435 residents in 1860, just before the outbreak of the Civil War, and Ontario 296. By 1870 the population of LaGrange had grown 55% during the decade, to 1038 while the county population grew by 24% to 14,148.

The commissioners kept county government spending under control. In 1840 the commissioners spent 75.7¢ per person in the county; in 1850 they spent 84.8¢ per person; in 1860, 78.5¢ per person and in 1870, $1.02 per person.

Public Square Shade Trees

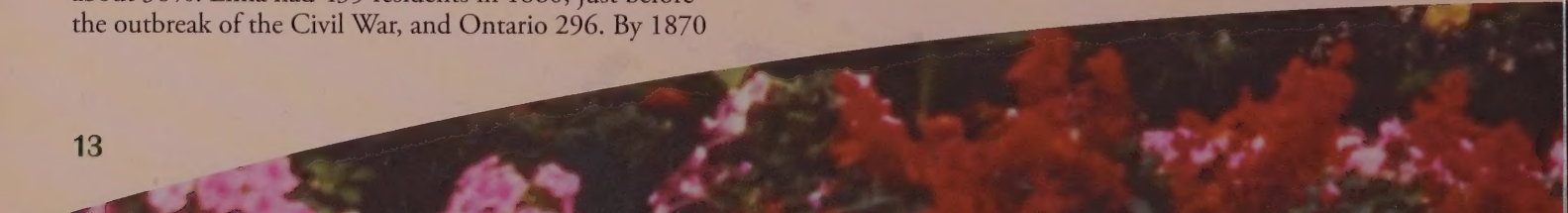
Perhaps they had been a bit too conservative. In the April 4, 1863 edition of the weekly LaGrange Standard, which had begun publication in 1857, the editor complained that the LaGrange courthouse square "was as barren as some of the deserts of Arabia, and no effort has been made to improve it, by setting out shade and ornamental trees, which, if properly set out should be an ornament to the village and a credit to the citizens of LaGrange. Let us.... make a forest of the public square." The Standard called for a public meeting at the courthouse on the following Wednesday. Apparently, the commissioners weren't moved to act as no trees were planted. The newspaper also urged residents of the town to set out shade and ornamental trees around their homes.

Thirteen years later, on May 8, 1876, the Standard reported that– finally- a "fine lot of maple trees" had been planted around the courthouse yard, but not by the commissioners. The plantings were a gratuitous gift of David Vankirk. "May he live long to enjoy their shade!" exclaimed the newspaper. More than 130 years later many of David Vankirk's trees still surround and shade the courthouse and the public square.

Call for a New Courthouse

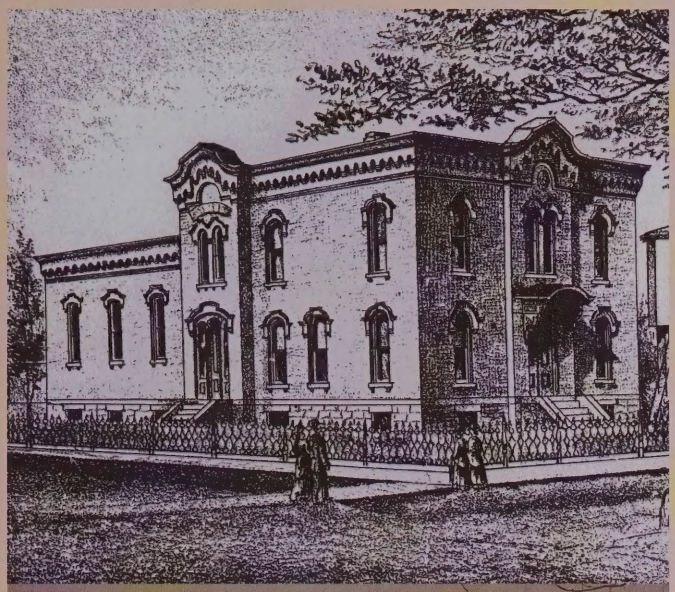
After the Civil War ended in 1865 and the county's population had increased from about 3700 in 1840 to 14,000 in 1870. There was recognition that more space was needed for the work of the county officials. And the building was showing signs of wear. The roof had been leaking and a new one of pine shingles was authorized by the commissioners in 1868. The Standard was pleased and reported on May 23 "the Court and Jury (on the second floor of the courthouse) will receive no more free shower baths."

During the summer of 1869, the LaGrange Democrat, a weekly newspaper also published in LaGrange, called for a new courthouse, a $100,000 one if necessary. The



Standard, the Republican-oriented weekly, agreed. "We shall very well be satisfied with one costing half that sum neighbor, let's keep that thing grinding." It would be another eight years of grinding before the commissioners agreed with the newspaper spokesmen.

The New Brick Jail



LaGrange County Jail

While the commissioners were being lobbied to build a new courthouse, they didn't hesitate to order the construction of a new county jail on February 2, 1872. The old log jail had served its purpose. A contract for a brick jail and sheriff's residence was let in March 1872 and it was completed and occupied eleven months later in February 1873. The jail portion was a one story above basement and the residence portion two stories. The foundations were laid with boulder stones and the walls above were brick. The outside was finished with white pressed brick manufactured at Grand Rapids, Michigan. The cost, $28,000, included a substantial iron fence around the building. (As a paperboy in the 1940's the writer delivered the daily South Bend Tribune to Sheriff and Mrs. Glenn Eash at the residence portion of that jail.)

Other brick buildings were being constructed in the town of LaGrange. In 1869 a disastrous fire destroyed six wooden business buildings across Detroit Street from the courthouse. During that fall and into 1870 the "Devor block" which consisted of two brick buildings, the first brick business buildings in LaGrange, were constructed just south of the alley on he east side of Detroit Street where some of the businesses had burned. (The writer's great-grandfather Christian Giggy, Christian's brother and their father Benedict Giggy, all of whom were stonemasons, built the foundation in 1869 for the "brick block" as the Devor buildings were called.)

In 1874 LaGrange town officials voted to construct a new brick school to replace the frame school. Building began in 1875, the same year the new brick school in Lima was completed. During that same year, the Standard urged the county commissioners to enlarge the public square by purchasing the lots and old houses to the west of the original public park, thus creating "a neat and respectable condition" for a new courthouse. A large and neat public square would even make the old courthouse look better claimed the Standard. (On December 8, 1877 the commissioners purchased lots 3, 4, 5and 7 of block 20- the block on which the wood courthouse was located– form Andrew and Susan Ellison for $2500. There may have been an older house or two on those lots, affecting the price.)

The Parry Brothers did their part in improving the attractiveness of the then smaller "public square." In August 1875, when excavating soil for the cellar of their business building nearby, they delivered the dirt to the courthouse square and filled some of the depressions.

In January 1875 the Standard reported that the "old papers" in the clerk's office were being "overhauled, enveloped and put in better order. A tedious work, done gratis." And a year later the newspaper warned that if the commissioners didn't build a new courthouse "pretty soon" they might have to offer a large reward for stolen records "as they did in St. Joseph County (South Bend) a few years ago."

Three months later the newspaper griped that the LaGrange courthouse was "so old it is bald headed."

Courthouse Safe Blown Open

There was some justification for a concern about the safety of the courthouse records. There had been an attempt to break open the safe in the treasurer's office in 1870 when it was partially blown up in a robbery attempt. Then on January 23, 1877, at about 2:30 a.m., James S. Drake and his wife, who had a room on the north sided of Michigan Street, across from the courthouse, were awakened by a "heavy thud" noise also heard by a number of other town residents. Mrs. Drake looked out the window and saw two men entering the courthouse. The 25-year old James Drake immediately pulled on his boots and was going to run over to the courthouse and investigate. But his wife intervened. They had been married only three weeks and Mrs. Drake worried about his safety, as the young lawyer had no firearm with which to protect himself. He agreed to arouse other neighbors to assist and hurried to the nearby homes of Mr. Crocker and Mr. L. Colliflower and son. By the time they reached the courthouse the two men had fled.

Drake and the others discovered the safe had been blown open, a "total wreck," and the treasurer's office in a demolished condition. Three hundred dollars of fractional currency had been stolen, the largest amount which had been left in the safe since the 1870 robbery attempt. The thieves had broken into a blacksmith shop in LaGrange and stolen tools to pry open the first two doors of the safe. Powder had then been poured into the indentation of the door to the money vault (the indentation had been made in the 1870 robbery attempt), a percussion match had been introduced and a string attached, which extended to the outdoors.

A jerk of the string set off the explosive and the robbers had reentered the courthouse and gathered their loot. They then hurried to the railroad depot, broke into the hand-car house, placed the hand-car on the rails and sped off. North or south? Sheriff Nelson Stacy and his deputies didn't know, so they telegraphed both directions– to Sturgis, Michigan and Kendallville, Indiana.

The burglars were not found and the county treasurer, Samuel G. Hoff, was by law personally responsible for the missing tax money. His four-year term expired that fall and he did not seek re-election.

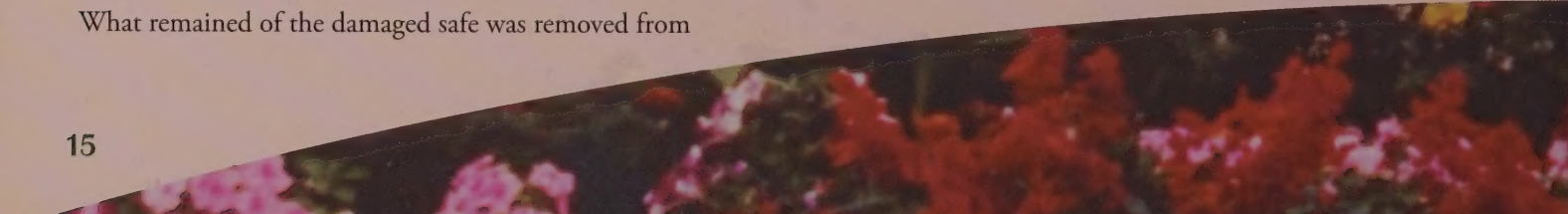
New Safe Won't Fit Through the Courthouse Door

What remained of the damaged safe was removed from the courthouse on March 12 for repairs and returned "good as new" about three months later. It then was placed in the clerk's office for his use. The commissioners ordered a new "burglar-proof" safe weighing 10,000 lbs. (versus the 3700 lbs. of the old safe) and it arrived for installation on June 4, 1877 but the safe was wider than either of the two doors of the courthouse. No problem. An opening through the outside wall was cut into the treasurer's office, the five-ton safe inserted and gaping hole repaired. Now it truly was time to build a new courthouse, one with double doors which double doors which could easily welcome a large safe or vault.

At the March session of the commissioners, the first regular one after the treasurer's safe had been robbed, they discussed the new courthouse idea but delayed action until the June session when tax rates for the year would be set. The Standard lobbied for action, perhaps embarrassed that surrounding counties had built new brick courthouses and disposed of their old ones. In 1864 DeKalb County had built an imposing two-story brick courthouse with a dome and flagstaff which extended skyward 115 feet above ground. Neighboring Steuben County, which had been formed out of LaGrange County in 1837, built a new brick courthouse at Angola in 1867-1868. And Elkhart County, out of which LaGrange County in 1832 had been formed, had completed a large brick courthouse at Goshen in 1868.

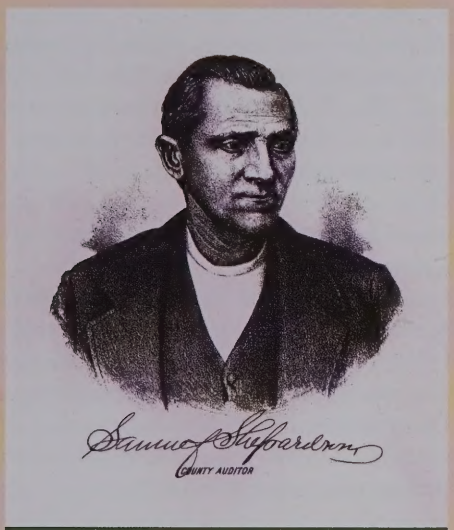
On March 15, 1877, the same day the damaged courthouse safe was removed, the Standard published a long article justifying the need for the construction of a new courthouse. It was a propitious time, stated the Standard, as labor and materials costs were lower than they had been in years. And, in two years it was expected that a new State House would be built in Indianapolis and taxation thereafter would be increased for four or five years. In LaGrange a "credible" courthouse could be built for $50,000 to $75,000 and should last for "at least fifty years." (As of 2007, the new courthouse had lsted 128 years.)

A tax rate of 25¢ on a $100 assessment could produce $18,000 per year or 30¢ on a $100 assessment could produce $21,000. Thus, proposed the Standard set the tax levy in June, let a contract in the fall, take two and one-half years to build and the courthouse could be paid off as it was built- and when finished there would be no interest to pay as no money would be required to be borrowed.



A New Brick Courthouse

At their September 1877 session, Commissioners Hezekiah Davis, Alanson Blackmun and George W. Edgcomb voted to construct a new "modern" courthouse. They visited Van Wert, Ohio and Decatur and Winchester, Indiana to inspect newly constructed courthouses in those towns. "They all appeared to be built more for show then for real safety, utility and convenience," claimed the Standard.



***Sam Shepardson** - County Auditor*

Samuel Shepardon, LaGrange County Auditor, and Samuel Bradford, County Clerk drew a general plan for the building with a layout of offices similar to the old wooden courthouse, but with a full basement and large tower. The building, to be 40' x 60' was to be of brick, built on a structure of iron girders with offices on the first floor for the treasurer, auditor, clerk, sheriff, and a commissioners room. The second floor was to contain a large court room, two petit jury rooms, a grand jury room, two witness and consultation rooms (one of which became a room for the county surveyor), a law library, a room for the county superintendent of schools and a janitors room. A three story tower was to be built over the center of the building. Heating was to be accomplished by coal burning stoves but the building was to be fitted for central heating "should it ever be desired." Interested architects were to submit detailed plans of the general outline which had been prepared by Shepardson and Bradford and which had been approved by the commissioners.

When the commissioners met with a number of architects who had prepared detailed specifications and estimated costs, they chose the architectural firm of A. J. Smith of Chicago. But differences arose and the commissioners ended the relationship. They then chose the Ft. Wayne architectural firm of Thomas J. Tolan & Son (Brentwood Tolan), who had established themselves in that city in 1875. The Tolan's design of the building's facade has been described as "renaissance revival," a style popular from 1840 to 1890, a "studied formalism." One of the architects who popularized this style was Richard Morris Hunt who designed buildings for the 1893 Columbian exposition in Chicago, where the style received great publicity.

The LaGrange County Courthouse was the first of six county courthouses designed by the Tolan's in Indiana. The courthouse in LaGrange was constructed during 1878 and 1879. The other Tolan-designed courthouses were: the Parke County courthouse (Rockville) constructed from 1879 to 1882, cost $111,156; the Kosciusko County courthouse (Warsaw), constructed from 1882 to 1884, cost $197,800: the Whitley County courthouse (Columbia City) built from 1888 to 1890, cost $143,793 and designed by Brentwood Tolan; the Delaware County courthouse (Muncie), designed by Brentwood Tolan, constructed from 1884 to 1887 at a cost of $195,618.46 and the Allen County courthouse (Fort Wayne), designed by Brentwood Tolan, constructed from 1897 to 1902 at a cost of $817,533.

***Samuel Bradford** - County Clerk*

Construction began at LaGrange, the commissioners had chosen the low bidders on the project, Charles Bosseker and John Begue of Fort Wayne who had bid $46,700. At the same time the commissioners appointed County Clerk Samuel Bradford as local superintendent of the building project to see that the work was done properly.

The first load of stone was delivered to the site in December 1877 by John Ryason. Ryason, who had settled near LaGrange in Clay Township in 1836, also furnished most of the store for the frame courthouse built in 1842-1843, thirty-four years earlier. The older courthouse remained in place at the northeast corner of the public square as it was not on the footprint of the new courthouse.

The footings for the building were large limestone blocks from six to ten feet wide, placed in floating mortar above concrete. This work required great strength and one of the workers was Christian Giggy, a strong man 46 years old, who had come from Switzerland and settled in Clay Township in the 1850's. "Bowlder" (boulder) stone was used above the footings for the foundation walls and the above-grade basement wall. The fieldstone work, used as facing on the below and above-grade foundation walls, proved to be a work of art.

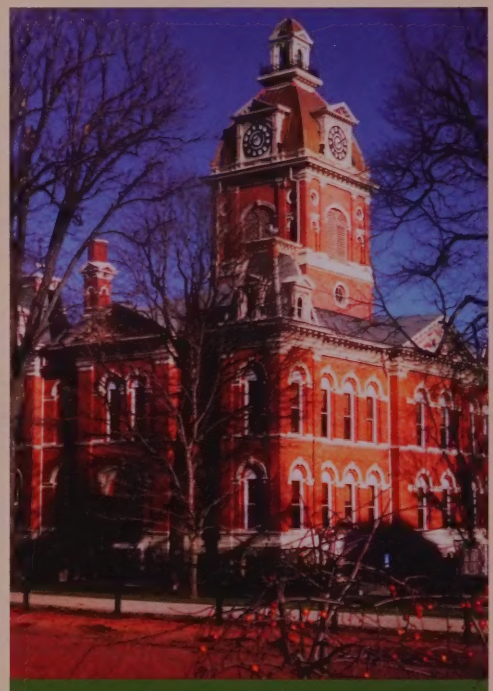
LaGrange County Courthouse - 1880

Cornerstone Dedication

By August 15, 1878 the foundations had been completed and the commissioners invited county residents to take part in a ceremony to lay the cornerstone. An estimated 2,000 persons attended, the largest crowd to date in the county's history. Odell's Martial Band and the Lima Silver Band provided music. The Reverend John Paul Jones, County Recorder, presided. John B. Howe of Lima spoke briefly. He did not believe in expensive and ornamental courthouses he said, they should be like justice itself, "simple and unostentatious." But he was willing to pay his part. Howe, the wealthiest man in LaGrange County, was an attorney and banker, who apparently made the beginnings of his fortune in land speculation. Not only the first teacher in LaGrange county, he was the first resident attorney. In the spring of 1835 Howe and Wesley Park platted the village of Auburn which had been part of LaGrange county from 1832 to 1835. On May 1, 1837 DeKalb County officially was formed and a contest for the county seat began between the centrally located paper-town of Centerville and the paper-town of Auburn, two miles south and three miles west of "Centerville." Auburn was chosen.

Perhaps it was chosen because of the in influence of Edmond Littlefield, one of the five "locating" commissioners to pick the new county seat. Littlefield, who was from LaGrange County, was one of its first elected commissioners in 1832. John B. Howe had arrived at Mongoquinong in 1833 as a 20-year old and the two men would have known each other in the small village.

Once the paper-town of Auburn had been chosen as county seat, the first "courthouse" was in the cabin of Wesley Park, Howe's partner. Park and Howe surely made a substantial amount of money in selling lots in their platted "town," which could have been the basis of Howe's fortune. By 1870 Howe was the richest man in LaGrange County, with $10,000 in real property and $100,000 in personal property- the latter most likely being the stock he held in a number of banks in Indiana and southern Michigan.



LaGrange County Courthouse - Circa 1950

Although Howe preferred a simple courthouse and although he and his wife had no children, Howe built in Lima, the largest and most expensive home in LaGrange county at the time. He became the founder of Howe Military School and in his honor the name of his town later was changed from Lima to Howe.

The second speaker at the cornerstone dedication in LaGrange was Andrew Ellison, apparently the second wealthiest man in the county. At least he was the wealthiest in the town of LaGrange with personal property valued

at $30,000 in 1870 and real property valued at $40,000. He may have paid more taxes than Howe for the new courthouse, if personal property was not taxed. Ellison, born in Ireland, came to Greenfield Township as an 18-year old with his parents in 1835. He lived his adult life in LaGrange and became its leading attorney. Either Howe or Ellison could have paid for the new courthouse out of their own pockets.

After the cornerstone laying, work on the courthouse continued. Iron girders were raised and connected and the brickwork began. Some of the brick manufactured in LaGrange County was used. Some was not. In September 1878, brick, which had been burned at the county Poor Farm located south of LaGrange, were condemned by the architect and not used. The outside layer of brick was pressed brick and manufactured at Porter Station, Indiana. During the brickwork three drunks appeared at the construction site. "One nice young man", reported the Standard, "fooling around a workman on the new courthouse was knocked into a lid of mortar... and unmercifully beaten."

Courthouse Tower, Clock, and Bell

The dome, or tower, built over the center of the courthouse had three floors: the dial room, the clock room and the bell room. A large clock, with faces in each direction, north, east, south and west, was installed. The bell, which served to strike the hour, was manufactured by the Mennely & Kimberly Company of Troy, New York and weighed 2,000 lbs. It arrived in LaGrange by train on May 29, 1879, was taken by wagon to the courthouse site and raised into the cupola tower. "The bell sounds well," reported the Standard, after it had been installed and tested.

Courthouse Clock and Court Bell

By 2007 the bell had been ringing faithfully to announce the hour for 128 years. At 156 strikes of the bell per day by November 13, 2007, including leap year days, when the courthouse will have celebrated its 128th birthday, the bell will have sounded 7,293,312 times.

The LaGrange county courthouse bell outweighed the DeKalb county courthouse bell at Auburn by 1,300 pounds. And, the total elevation of the new LaGrange structure from ground level to the top of the tower finial was 125 feet, surpassing that of DeKalb's courthouse by 10 feet. (Although such figures were not in print, they certainly had been individually noted, especially by the commissioners). For years, before the advent of "machines," (gasoline powered vehicles) the LaGrange courthouse bell could be heard well over a mile away, letting residents know the hour. Even in more recent times, when traffic noise is abated, the pealing of the courthouse bell can be heard a good distance.

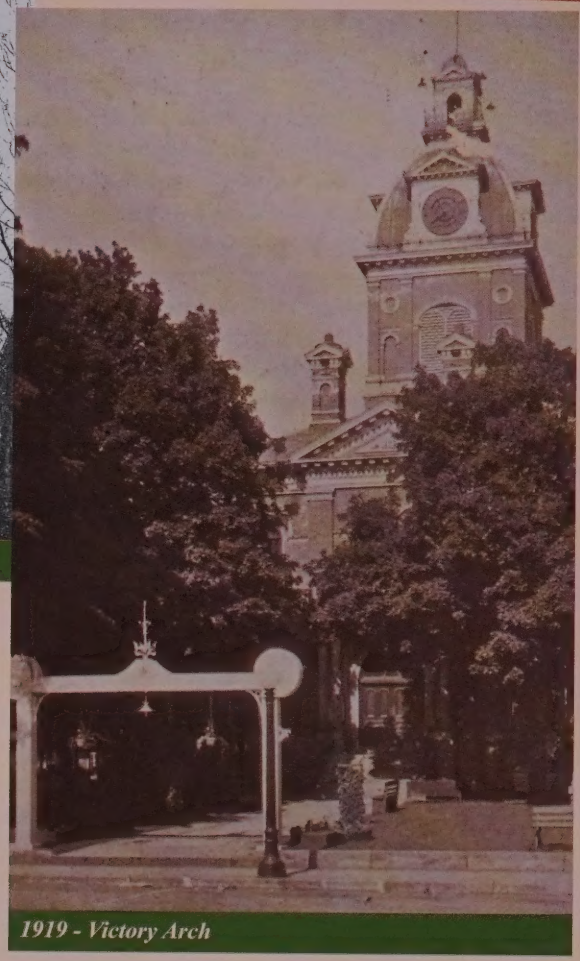
During the construction process the roof of the courthouse was covered with the "best quality" black slate, two feet long and fourteen inches wide, held in place by copper nails. The interior walls covered with three coats of plaster over lath and the interior finish wood was constructed entirely of black walnut and ash, the contrasting colors of great natural beauty (and which has been well maintained over the years). Oak was used for the office floors and main corridors were covered with black and white marble.

The second-floor court room measured 24' x 57' with a 20' high ceiling which is frescoed. (Some years later the court room was butchered with a lowered ceiling and the frescos removed or covered. But more recently the false ceiling has been removed and the frescos and the court room have been very handsomely restored.)

In 1879 water was brought into each room of the new building by gravity feed from the windmill water tank at the jail yard across the street to the west. The courthouse had essentially been made fireproof.

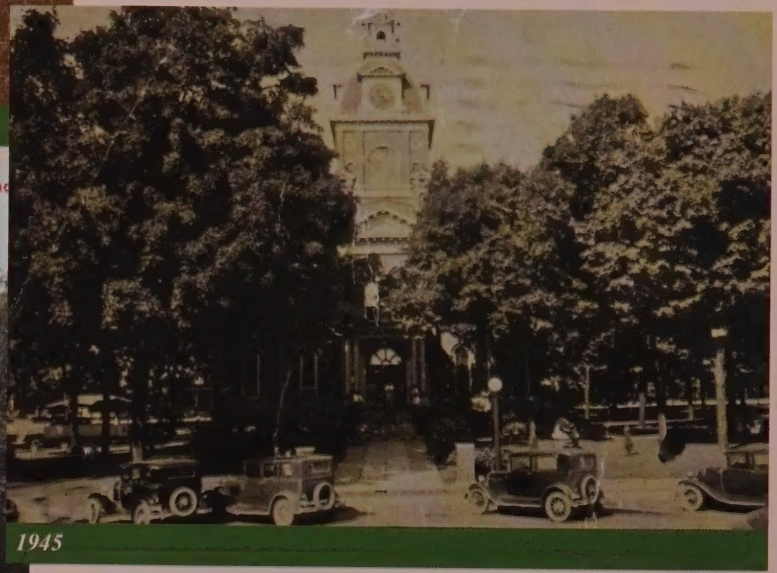
The new courthouse "being a credit to all concerned" believed the LaGrange Standard, the names of workmen were published on November 13, 1879.

1893



1919 - Victory Arch

1913



1945

1919

List of Workers

CONTRACTOR'S FORMAN: E.F. Leibman

STONE CUTTERS
P. Gable
P. Rhinehart
P. Riley
M. Kelley
J. Connars
J. Moore
H. Vancaster
J. Helpen
H. Weisenberger
C. Shoemaker
E. Rule
J. Byrwe
J. Divinde
D. Kelly
A. Valentine
W. Woodman
J. Synet
E. Byrns
H. Cannoben

STONE MASONS
R. J. Van
F. Grond
F. Schmidt
L. Hirshfalder
J. Kielkoff
Daniel Free
E. Wixson
A. Rose
Marion Teeters
S. Baker
John Fought
H. Sexton
M. Hostetler
M. Lanuyon
G. Lamb
S. Shattuck
W. Culver
J. Bottenfelt
L. Carr
G. Fox
O. Evers
J. Donne
W. Willett
C. Sullivan
J. Totter

BRICK LAYERS
S. Hutchens
S. Nead
J. Gee
J. Summers
W. Gephart
J. Schnelker
C. Deming
F. Valentine
T. Edwards
W. Valentine
J. Harsh
A. Harsh
W. Jackson

PRESS BRICK LAYERS
Charles Evans
H. Nolen
William Satterfield

CARPENTERS
A. F. Skeer
T. Galloway
T. J. Skeer
C. Franks
Jacob Welch
J. D. Waller
C. Camplan
George Thomas
D. D. Dodge
T. F. Wright
J. E. Ropp
J. F. Royer
S. F. Wilson
J. M. Henry
J. Aman

PAINTERS
J. Fidell, fresco painter
Charles Rivers, chief painter
P. Krane
J. Rower
R. Brooks
J. Balder
T. Buchel

LABORERS
George Shapland
J. Hogeman
C. Lounsbury
E. A. Wilson
J. Huskins
J. Bark
W. Simpson
I. Eyler
W. Myers
J. Hoover
W. Fish
W. Taylor
T. Anderson
H. Munger
J. Wood
J. Sheely
F. Lounsbury
G. H. Case
A. Sunderland
J. Neal
H. Free
W. Campbell
A. Triplett
S. Nolan
F. Ladsworth
J. Kelly
J. Meese
J. Hanson
P. Embody
J. Moony
G. Steward
G. Daube
J. Steckett
J. McCambridge
H. Feld
T. Hoover
L. Devlin
F. Deter

TEAMSTERS
M. Cowan
B. Jones
Charles Triplett
E. Densmore
A. Summerlin
M. Lunsford
Henry Sage
W. Fish
Charles Large Truman

LABORERS
J. Matthews
G. Allman
J. Horning
J. E. Duck
J. Yager
J. Koor
J. Zin
J. Marks
C. Wertsbaugher
J. Criteer
F. Boscker
C. Guthrie
D. Steward
H. Sunday
J. Stevens
G. Daub
Charles Large
J. Stuard
A. Miller
A. Skeer
W. Smith
J. Large
W. Pearson
L. Mosher
P. Rinehart
S. Yoder
J. Brown
J. Earst
V. Miller
J. Johnson, Jr.
L. Goshon
M. Lunsford
F. Gephart
C. Durimple
J. Hemminger
C. Shelner
H. Kennedy
A. Shaffer
W. Gephart
F. Cornwall
E. Densmore
C. Amel
G. Hoog
S. Meeroffen

TINNERS
Gotfred Hoffer
F. Hoffer
F. Ramer

The Cost

When the building was accepted by the commissioners on November 13, 1879 the total cost was more than the $46,700 low bid. There had been an approximate 17% cost overrun on the construction and with the additional costs of new furniture, architect fees, a tower clock and bell, recently purchased real estate to complete a true public square, grading the court yard and the purchase of an iron fence in 1880 for $2500 to enclose the entire square, the total project came to something less than $75,000. It was paid by annual property taxes as it was built and was debt free when completed in November 1879. From the time of the construction bids it had taken less than 17 months to complete.

Annual Expenditures	Tax Rate on $100 Valuation
1876 - $18,386.39	25¢
1877 - $17,570.62	53¢
1878 - $30,484.79	85¢
1879 - $68,654.11	41¢
1880 - $54,350.07	40¢
1881 - $30,466.45	40¢
1882 - $27,240.27	50¢

Old Courthouse Sold

The old courthouse, which now stood rather forlornly next to the majestic new one, was sold at public auction to Andrew Ellison, LaGrange's foremost attorney and wealthiest citizen. He didn't want to see it destroyed. Ellison had practiced law in the building since almost the day it had opened in 1844. He had represented an untold number of residents of the county at the old courthouse and had been assistant to the state's prosecuting attorney in the famous 1870 murder trial of Stephen Jenks, who had killed George Mallow at Ontario. (The jury found Jenks guilty and he received a life sentence.)

1931 Courthouse "Barn"

Ellison had the old courthouse dismantled and moved the timbers by bobsleds to the Ellison family farm, first owned by his parents and in 1879 owned by his sister Mary, Mrs. Henry Sherman. The Ellison farm was located on the Vistula Road (now state road 120) east of Lexington (now Brighton). The old courthouse was reassembled into a barn on the farm his father had homesteaded with his family in 1835.

In 1931 the old courthouse "barn" was still standing, 88 years after it had been built, although in somewhat different form, the old Ellison farm, then owned by E.G. Grubaugh. The LaGrange Standard, which printed a picture of the barn in its February 13, 1936 edition, suggested that the building be reconstructed to its original condition, to serve as a "public memorial" to the pioneer days of LaGrange County. Such a task could be taken on by the "county itself or some patriotic organization." But such never happened.

Odds and Ends

Use of Courtroom: Political Meetings and Corn School Activity

Once the new courthouse was in operation in 1879 it was of course, routinely used by the elected county officials to conduct their daily business. But the commissioners also allowed the large courtroom, which could seat 200 persons, to be used by the public during the evening or on a Saturday when routine business was not being conducted. Most often during the 1880's, 1890's and into the early 1900's the court room was used for political party meetings, particularly by the Republicans and Democrats. When it became time to choose their candidates for LaGrange town or county elections, the two political parties would hold their caucuses in the court room, sometimes the meetings drew a large number of party regulars and other time the meetings might be rather sparsely attended, or at least so claimed the Republican Standard when reporting on some of the meetings of the minority Democrats.

When the unique Corn School day began in 1906 to recognize the county schools' Boys Corn Club, members who grew their own plots of corn and were recognized in the fall, and when all county students were given the day off to participate in the school parade, and when the one-day event in 1908 became a multi-day affair with the Farm Products Show and Corn School– thousands of county residents attended because of such additional attractions

as speech-making by prominent politicians, Governors and U.S. Senators who spoke to throngs of people from a platform erected on the public square.

When inclement weather intervened one year, the speech making was taken inside to the large courtroom. And, when the "Better Babies" contest was added to the Corn School agenda, it too was held in the courtroom, with a crowd of mothers, babies, nurses, doctors and judges.

No Smoking - 1883

For a time there was a no-smoking regulation, at least in the courtroom if not in the entire courthouse. Whether cuspidors were available for spitting when one chewed tobacco is not known. However, in May of 1883 Judge Lowry put out his Havana cigar he was smoking after being told there was a rule which did not allow smoking in the courthouse. He amicably complied.

Bucket Pump - 1883

In May 1883 a new bucket pump was installed, apparently by action of the commissioners. " A good one," noted the Standard. Apparently it was used to water horses. A photograph of the courthouse which was published in the LaGrange County Atlas of 1893 shows this bucket pump at the southeast corner of the public square outside of the iron fence, next to an unidentified small shack at the edge of the street. Horse and buggy or horse and wagon were the conventional mode of travel until the automobile began to appear during the early 1900's. And horses needed their water.

Adjusting the Courthouse Clock - 1891

In June 1891 the commissioners ordered that the courthouse clock be adjusted to be the same as "Standard" time, with an approximate 15-minute change. LaGrange had been just a little bit behind. Standard time was the time used by the railroads and in 1870 the Grand Rapids & Indiana Railroad reached LaGrange from the north and the same year was completed from LaGrange south to Fort Wayne. It was important to know when the trains arrived and departed.

Electricity in the Courtroom - 1898

Let There Be More Light!

In May 1898 Judge Wilson, after receiving a report from a committee assigned to investigate the matter, ordered that electricity for eight fixtures be installed in the court room, adjacent rooms and the hall leading to the court room. The cost would be $218.48 including the fixtures. Electricity would be furnished on the meter plan. Judge Wilson's order did not apply to the county office rooms not used by the court. The furnishing of electricity for those rooms would have to be provided by the commissioners.

***Dome Lights** - Note the flood lights on the tower after electricity arrived.*

The Knights of Rest - 1901

Mr. Balyeatt, the courthouse janitor, planted new grass and to protect it he ran a wire on either side of the walkway from the east entrance of the courthouse to the street to keep the "Knights of Rest," as the Standard described them, off the new grass until it was established. . In a few weeks, the wire could be removed for "the benefit of Ed Show and his order of Never Sweats."

The Cost Drinking Fountain for People and Dogs - 1902

In 1883 the commissioners had provided water for horses with the bucket pump and 19 years later, in 1902, they decided to provide water for people and dogs. The commissioners authorized and paid for a drinking fountain at the southeast corner of the courthouse square. However, it was to be placed and maintained by the town of LaGrange. The fountain had "drinking places for thirsty dogs as well as men," reported the Standard. The water was separate but equal. Later, similar water fountains were placed next to Brown's Drug Store at the corner of Detroit and Michigan streets and next to Plyley's Candy store at the corner of Detroit and Wayne streets. (The writer used them all many times beginning in the 1930's.)

Benches - 1905

The editor of the Standard, while looking out his window in June 1905, observed an aged farmer sitting beneath a tree on the courthouse lawn. Why not provide a few comfortable seats or benches, asked the editor, so that people from the country might enjoy coming to LaGrange

more often if their comfort was considered. "Janitor Spearow has our lawn in handsome shape."

New Slate - 1906

Due to leaks in the roof of the courthouse, new slate shingles were ordered to be installed. The work was done by Andrew Slabaugh.

Spiral Staircase - 1907

An architectural feature of the brick courthouse was a spiral metal staircase from the first floor clerk's office to the courtroom on the floor above. In cold weather it became a "sort of cold weather shaft." It was said that Judge Joseph D. Ferrall contracted a fatal illness from the cold draft. The Standard insisted that a radiator should be placed in the shaft "without delay."

Iron Fence Removal - 1907

The iron fence, which enclosed the public square was a real thorn in the side of the editor of the Standard. Perhaps because he looked at it almost daily from his office window across the street. Built in 1880 at a cost of $2500, a substantial amount of money at the time, the Standard, beginning in 1902, lobbied the commissioners to "REMOVE THE FENCE." If it were removed and if the weeds along the walk and fence were cut, and if a dozen or more old telephone poles were chopped down and if the hitching posts removed to a vacant lot, LaGrange would have "as pretty a courthouse square" as could be found in the state. "Other counties have nice lawns unprotected by fences, why cannot LaGrange," bemoaned the Standard.

It was to take five more years until 1907, before the Standard was successful in its lobbying and the fence sold and removed. By 1905 the newspaper's patience was wearing thin. "That fence was all right thirty or forty years ago (it had been erected 25 years before) when the cows and other stock roamed at large at Brown's, Brett's and Will's corners (all adjacent to the courthouse square) and had free access to salt barrels and other things, and when farmers had to carry that big stick to keep them from eating their feed from their wagons; but, thanks to the good people of LaGrange, no more the lowing of the cow is heard on the streets, no digging trenches by the young porker, and now why not get that fence away at or near the same time that the last saloon moves out?" (Alcohol and saloons were other favorite lobbying targets of the Standard.)

Another 1905 plea by the newspaper read thus: "Janitor Spearow has the courthouse lawn in handsome shape. It would look much better and be easier keep neat if the disreputable old fence was removed. The old iron fence, rusty and brown, sagging in here, sagging out there– what excuse can there be for the retention around our handsome courthouse lawn?" By that fall the county council and county commissioners were discussing the fence situation but could not come to an agreement about what action to take.

In the summer of 1906 Judge Otis L. Ballou of LaGrange joined the lobbying efforts and suggested that a portion of the fence be used to enclose the grave site of Dr. David Rogers (located at the present Rogers County Park) who had willed his entire estate to the county, under the commissioners control, for the benefit of the orphan children and the indigent of LaGrange county.

In September 1906 the county council unanimously approved selling the fence and granted authority to the commissioners to do so. Finally, the date of April 1, 1907 was set to auction the fence with a minimum bid of $300. At the auction no one bid. The price seemed "altitudinous" to the bidders claimed the Standard.

Another auction date was set, July 1, with no minimum bid required. At the outcry auction at the courthouse, Charles S. Nichols, representing "Lima Men" secured the fence with a bid of $175.00. The Lima folks planned to use the fence to enclose the Riverside cemetery in Lima. Mr. Nichols had 60 days to remove the fence. The 1880 fence still surrounds Riverside Cemetery.

The county council then appropriated $4000 to build new six-foot wide cement sidewalks around the public square so it would present a new look in time for the second Corn School Day to be held in October, 1907.

The Brick Pavement - 1907

In 1907 the LaGrange town council completed a great improvement by paving Detroit street with brick, from Central avenue to Factory street, a total of five blocks. It became the first paved street or road in LaGrange County. The work was completed on August 22 and the town council also purchased a street sweeper to sweep sand into spaces between the bricks and to clean off any excess sand. With the county due to build new sidewalks around the public square in September and with Detroit street paved for five blocks, one of which fronted the east side of the courthouse square, the county council and commissioners couldn't resist spending another $4000 to pave the streets surrounding the other three sides of the square with brick.

A few years later, once the three blocks on the south, west and north sides of the square had been paved with brick, the Standard couldn't refrain from bragging in its special 32-page Corn School editions with a picture of the courthouse: "The Courthouse Park… The Restful Spot that is the center of Corn School Week. Entirely surrounded by broad paved streets."

Saga of the Restrooms - 1908 to 1915

What to do about public restrooms? During business hours the courthouse rest rooms apparently could be used by the public. In 1906 and 1907 when Corn School was a one-day affair on a Friday and with no evening events scheduled, the interior restrooms in the courthouse were available to the public. But in 1908 Corn School became a multi-day affair with the Farm Products Show added and more thousands attended.

The courthouse facilities had been updated in 1901. The men's toilet room had been "completely overhauled." It was fitted with the latest designs of flushing "closets" and urinals. And a "complete sewerage system has been installed" in the women's toilet room. On the second floor, in the court room corridor, a newly created toilet room was installed for the attorneys. These facilities apparently could be used by the public, but only during office hours when the courthouse was open.

In 1908, during Corn School week, thousands crowded onto the courthouse lawn and into the streets to hear speakers, often politicians– governors and U.S. senators, who commanded a platform erected on the south side of the courthouse. Fortunately, for those needing a rest room facility, N. Stroup & Co., a local lumber company, rented the empty rooms of a store across from the courthouse and provided comfortable chairs for women and children and a toilet facility. After Corn School ended in 1908 the Standard again lobbied the county commissioners for an improvement. A "permanent rest room," open all year and with access from the outside of the courthouse was needed by the "women and children" (men were on their own). Here was an opportunity for a "live man to lead in a public movement." (Apparently, no pun was intended by the Standard and apparently no woman was qualified to lead such a movement.)

The commissioners, however slowly, followed the Standard's advice, but it was not until four years later, in 1912, that a rest room with an outdoor entrance at the northeast basement corner of the courthouse for "women and children" was authorized– to be completed before Corn School that fall. The rooms would have "plastered walls, a new floor, toilets, necessary partitions, electric lights and steam heat… protected from unfavorable weather conditions." What a relief.

In 1915 county officials decided to lock the women's rest room at the outside entrance at 10:00 p.m. after two mirrors had been stolen.

Men's Restroom - 1920

Finally for the long-suffering men, on the south side of he courthouse, a stone entrance was built by contractor Airgood, to the men's toilet room in the basement, to give them access from the outside.

Fire - 1910

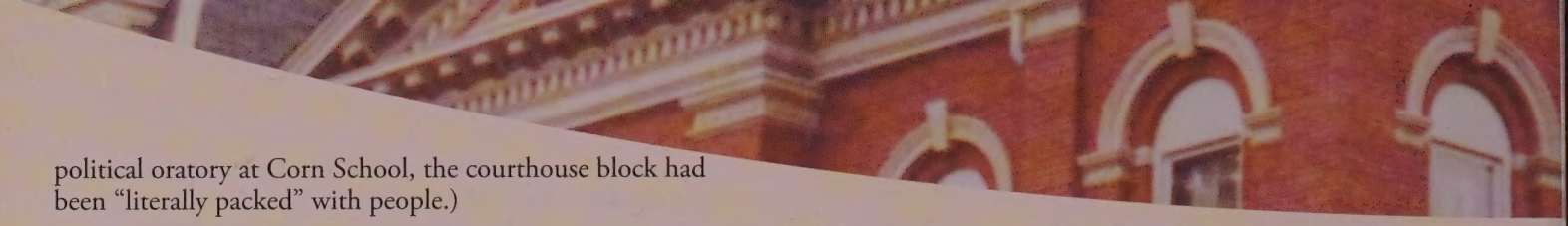
On February 11, 1910, County Auditor Weaver discovered a fire in the southwest corner of the commissioner's room, caused by an overheated pipe in a chimney. He and County Clerk Troxel had extinguished the fire with a few buckets of water by the time the fire department arrived. The blaze charred some of the woodwork and smoke damaged some of the frescoing in the room. The chimney, used originally for a wood stove, may well have had a creosote buildup on the inside, making it combustible.

A year later, the room was re-frescoed by Kovet (Kover?) and Son of Fort Wayne, paid by the county's fire insurance policy. The chimney's "defect" also was remedied.

Keep off the Grass - 1910

W.D. Rheubottom, editor of the LaGrange Saturday Call, an independent weekly newspaper, deplored the abuse of the courthouse lawn during the previous summer of 1909. It had been "converted into a playground for boys and resort of the careless and idle loafer" and the result was the grass had been "trampled to death" and the lawn nearly ruined. In response the commissioners had been "driven to put up 'keep off the grass signs'." It would help, admitted the Call, but would not be like former days when it had been "a pleasure during the summer heat to linger on its beautiful carpet of green beneath the shade of its magnificent trees."

The Call also admonished the commissioners to "absolutely prohibit" any convention, public speeches or exhibition of farm products on tables or tents on the lawn, i.e.– Corn School. Such had caused the greatest damage to the grass. (In 1908 the Standard reported that during the



political oratory at Corn School, the courthouse block had been "literally packed" with people.)

Paint Job - 1910

In 1910 the commissioners hired Bill Hall to paint the outside woodwork and the tower of the courthouse. Hall was about 75 years old and for several days had been painting the tower "about one hundred and twenty feet above the green grass." It was a job that "many a young man would decline promptly and without hesitation," reported the Standard in admiration.

Cement Driveway - 1914

Four of the "Lima gang," held in the county jail on drunk and disorderly charges, were put to work by courthouse janitor Kitchen to help build a cement driveway for coal delivery wagons from the north sidewalk to the west side of the courthouse, where coal was unloaded through windows into the basement. The county purchased its coal in the spring when the price was lowest and before the cement driveway was built, tracks were left in the soft ground which disfigured the lawn.

Beauty Spot - 1927

"Courthouse Park One of the Beauty Spots in This Section of Nation," headlined the Standard in an article on July 15, 1927. The editor called attention to the excellent work of courthouse janitor Harry C. Free, who had "planted shrubbery and flowers and plants all over the place, with a gift of artistry that only the occasional man possesses." Free's landscaping had resulted in "hundreds" of tourists who passed through LaGrange on roads nine and twenty to "hesitate for a little while and enjoy the park and its environs."

Restorations

The restoration of the LaGrange Circuit Courtroom was one of several projects identified by the LaGrange County Commissioners in September of 2000. A Facility Assessment, completed by Scearce Rudisel Architects identified five necessary phases.

1. Tower, chimney and roof repair and painting.
2. Front step and ramp repair.
3. Outside stonework, masonry and eave repair.
4. Circuit courtroom ceiling, mechanical, and mural repair and painting.
5. Courtroom lighting, carpeting and flooring repair.

Grant writer Carol Ellinger obtained a grant from the Indiana Historic Preservation Fund for $50,000.00 in 2000 for phase one of the Courthouse plan.

In 2005 several ceiling tiles fell from the Circuit Court ceiling into the laps of startled Teen Court jurors during a severe rainstorm during a Teen Court session. Temporary repairs were made. Later in 2005, a Blackbird entered a hole in the Circuit Court wall and ceiling and interrupted a hearing by its flight. A concerned police officer offered to shoot the intruder, but was told to arrest the bird by peaceful means. In November 2005, Dennis DeMara of D&S builders based bid of $130,522 was approved. Construction began in September of 2006. Restoration of the two ceiling and one wall mural and the round ceiling mural was considered by James Adams, Chair of the Art Department of Manchester College, local artist Maurice Marks and local artist Carl Mosher of Heartland Studios.

Some of the craftsmen involved were Arnie Flowers, Andy Pagels, John Alleshouse, Ed Deboer, Chad Iddings, Byron Keck with D&S. Also involved were Tom Wagner with Flow Tech, Robert West of West Plastering, LLC., Tim Hardick with Hardick & Sons Electric, Estelle Carney and Jeff Duzan with Carney Decorating and Michelle Crisman, decorator. Angela Johnson sat for Carl Mosher as the model for Lady Blind Justice.

The restoration project was unveiled to the public at a dedication ceremony on February 23, 2007. Local officials briefly expressed their appreciation of the excellent restoration project and the public's confidence that the Courthouse would continue to be the hub of community affairs into the foreseeable future. Chief Justice of the Indiana Supreme Court, Randall Shepard added his thoughts that the Courthouse represented a civil society's effort to rule itself peacefully.

LaGrange County Courthouse Energy Committee

Members: Philip Bir
Frank Brown
Earl Hackett
J.D. Hostetler
Bernard Hoffman
Kay Myers
Jac Price
Joy Sharp
Kevin Stackhouse
Dave Coner County Representative

1st Meeting Date: February 17, 2001, 9:00 a.m. County Commissioners Room.

Epilogue

Daniel Harding was another of those men early involved in the establishment of LaGrange County and who wore many "hats." A veteran of the War of 1812, in 1832 he was elected the first Sheriff of LaGrange County for a three-year term. (For some reason he didn't qualify and the Governor appointed Nehemiah Coldren sheriff for at least one year of the three-year term.)

At the first term of the Circuit Court held in the county in October 1832, the judge appointed Harding bailiff. In January 1833 the commissioners appointed him supervisor of one of four "supervisor districts of Lima Township (which comprised over ½ of LaGrange county) and at the same session appointed him "viewer" of the proposed road from Mongoquinong (Lima) north to the state line. In 1835 the commissioners appointed him County Assessor for the year. By that year he had been appointed County Agent handling business for the commissioners such as selling county lots.

During the 1830's Harding did a great deal of contract work on the courthouse and jail in Lima and in one year alone, 1838, received $482.87 for a variety of jobs and material provided. In 1837 he was appointed trustee of the county library. By the early 1840's he handled much of the development work in preparing for the contracting of the work to build the courthouse and animal pound in LaGrange. (And by 1840 he had fathered 10 children.)

Still living in Lima Township in 1870 as a retired farmer and 77 years of age, Harding had assets of $5,600 in real estate and personal property, a prosperous man.

John Kromer, surveyor of the Lima town site and surveyor for many of the first LaGrange county roads and the father of the first white child born in LaGrange County, had been elected county recorder in 1843 while living in Lima. He moved to the little settlement of LaGrange Center when the new courthouse opened in 1844 and continued to be elected and serve as county recorder until 1855. By 1860 he was listed in the federal census as being a grocer in LaGrange, 66 years old, and worth $2,500 in real property and $1,200 in personal property. In 1870 Kromer listed his occupation as surveyor and still lived in LaGrange at the age of 75. Three daughters, aged 11, 14 and 17, were at home. Elizabeth, apparently his second wife, was listed as 28 years old in the 1850 census, 36 in the 1860 census and 45 in the 1870 census– she kept getting younger. In 1870 Kromer owned real property valued at $3,000 and personal property valued at $100. His first-born, Henry M., born at Lima in 1832, lived in Bloomfield Township in 1900 at the age of 68. In 1910, at 78, he lived with his daughter and her family in Ludington, Michigan.

Francis F. Jewett continued to live in Lima and in 1860 was 56 years old and practicing law. He owned real property valued at $1,000, much less than the $2,000 of real property he possessed in 1850. By 1870 Jewett had passed away but his widow Lucretia live in Lima at the home of Savilla Wisher.

Josiah T. Hobbs in 1850 still lived in Lima, listed as a physician in the census, with an estate of $12,000 in real property, the third wealthiest man in Lima township after Nathan Jenks and his wife Jane, who had assets of $25,150 at Ontario and Norman Lee, a Lima innkeeper who owned property valued at $30,000.

Soon after 1850 Dr. Hobbs moved to Ohio but still retained much property in LaGrange County. By 1870, living in Mt. Vernon, Ohio he possessed a large fortune of $100,000 in real estate and $50,000 in personal property. As late as 1875 he visited LaGrange to look after his real estate interests. Hobbs died prior to 1880 in Sandusky, Ohio. The executors of his interests in LaGrange County were Samuel K. Ruick and Henry L. Taylor.

Courtroom Restoration

Before

After (2006)

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